

*CONTRIBUTIONS TO MODERN EDUCATION*

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*General Editor* Susan Isaacs, M A , D Sc.

EXPERIMENTS WITH  
A BACKWARD CLASS



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EXPERIMENTS WITH A BACKWARD CLASS

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# EXPERIMENTS WITH A BACKWARD CLASS

*by*

ELIZABETH A. TAYLOR, B A

WITH TWO HALF-TONE PLATES  
AND SIX LINE ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE TEXT

METHUEN & CO LTD. LONDON  
*36 Essex Street, Strand, W.C.2*

*First published in 1946*



THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED IN  
COMPLETE CONFORMITY WITH THE  
AUTHORIZED ECONOMY STANDARDS

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

## FOREWORD

IF WE are attracted by the title of this book and take it up in the hope of getting new light upon the contributory causes of backwardness, with hints about new methods of educating backward children, we find what we look for in both directions. Miss Taylor shows us clearly, by the analysis of cases, how the complex threads of inheritance, of family and social influence, of bodily health and school history, are woven into that intricate pattern of development and experience which constitutes 'backwardness'. Her inspired account of her ways of meeting the needs of backward children makes an outstanding contribution to educational technique.

But we have not read more than the opening paragraphs of the book before we forget about such abstract notions as 'backwardness' and 'theories' of education. We become altogether absorbed in the living picture of these actual children as *persons*, each struggling in his own way to deal—at such odds—with his own life and experience, each trying to meet the un-understood demands of this queer place called 'school'.

We are not surprised that Miss Taylor was able to awaken the dramatic interests of the children, since she has herself so strong an awareness of the drama of their lives and feelings, and can so well evoke this awareness in us. As we read on, we find ourselves writing and perusing all those letters to 'Miss', with the children's own zest. We feel their delight in discovering at last what 'reading' and 'writing' are *about*, what they are *for*. We find with the children that this strange place called 'school', and the queer things we are expected to do there, may have some sense for us, too, some concern with our private interests. We discover that the mysterious affairs of 'history' and 'arithmetic', and all the tradition of learning, may have intimate links with our own lives, and that what we, as 'backward' children, want to know and to do, may have its own place in the life of man and of our world as a whole, may be a key to unlock that world for us.

It is precisely here that the secret of Miss Taylor's success is to be found. This is the essence of what she has to teach other educationists. It is because she understood the *function* of the school, the purpose of the tools of learning, in the children's own lives, that she was able to awaken their wish to master those tools, was able to make the school a place of ambition and hope and fulfilment for the children.

Those teachers who are endeavouring to realize the same aims will find help in this book, which brings so valuable an instance of the proper relationship between teacher and pupils, and so clear an account of the profound psychological understanding by which the day-to-day work was inspired.

SUSAN ISAACS

*March 20, 1945*

## PREFACE

THIS LITTLE book does not presume to offer new and original discoveries in the field of the principles underlying the art of teaching, for the fundamental ideas of 'purposeful activity' upon which its matter is based have now for a long time been more or less familiar to the majority of teachers. But comparatively few have seriously experimented in putting theory into practice, and still fewer have made their experiments available for others to study and to compare with what they themselves are doing in the classroom, so that much that might be useful and helpful to teachers as a body is entirely lost to them.

It is with this point in mind that the following pages have been written. What is recounted here was done, with a class of poor mentality, in an ordinary elementary school. The primary aim of this account is to demonstrate how, in an actual case, the activities described came into being, to show how they sprang *from the suggestions and ideas of the boys themselves*, and to record the manner in which, by the combined energies of teacher and class, it was possible to translate them into useful and acceptable vehicles of education, revealing the potentialities inherent in even dull children if given the opportunity to display and to pursue their natural bent, and to follow a curriculum which takes into consideration their particular needs and adapts itself to their ascertained interests. Moreover, the fact that the experiments here described could be made within the system of public education, and that they received the blessing of H M Inspector, is a proof of the freedom enjoyed by teachers in maintained schools.

E A T.

MANCHESTER

*January 1945*



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CHAPTER I  
THE CLASS

*Bottom* You were best to call them generally, man by man,  
according to the scrip

*Quince* Here is the scroll of every man's name

NONE KNEW better than Nick Bottom how to handle a situation, and, in inviting the reader to meet the group of youngsters, named Standard IIIa, of a city Elementary School, no more suitable method could be adopted than to play Quince to Bottom's advice, and to introduce the class boy by boy. Then, at least one outstanding characteristic of this group will quickly become evident, for it will be impossible not to notice its remarkable variety—the variety of age, ranging from the 8 years, 2 months of Tommy to the 12 years, 2 months of Henry, the differing circumstances of the homes in which the boys lived, the varying past histories, the different records of health and ill-health, the individual peculiarities of temperament, the uneven standards of attainment, and the diversity of mental equipment, embracing as it did almost every degree of capacity, from that of John and Tommy, with intelligences well above the normal, to that of George and Richard who were properly classified as feeble-minded. Then, too, with these points in mind, the reader will appreciate some of the problems confronting the teacher of the 'dull and backward' class which exists within the framework of the ordinary Elementary School, where, relegated so often to the smallest classroom, and without any selected equipment for the job, she pounds away at the Three R's with grim persistence, as though making paper pulp for a puppet-head, but without hope, for, unfortunately, the material with which she is working is less malleable than paper pulp, and the modelling refuses to come out in the desired forms.

Strictly speaking, John (8  $\frac{3}{12}$  years, I Q  $^{118}9$ ), Tommy

<sup>1</sup> For a brief note concerning Intelligence Quotients and the measuring of mental capacity, see Appendix II at the end of this book.

(8 3/12 years, I Q 118 7) and Ronnie (8 7/12 years, I Q. 104 8) were out of place in Standard III<sub>B</sub>, for, in inborn capacity and in attainment, they outdistanced with ease all their duller companions. But they had been promoted directly from Standard I, and were, therefore, the youngest in the class. Ronnie was a cheery little wag, with a pale face lit up by a pair of large brown eyes, surmounted by a stiff fringe of hair strongly reminiscent of a row of broken-down fencing. He possessed a pleasing sturdiness of character, and brought to his work such steady application that, at the end of one term, he defeated his two better-endowed rivals and was sent to Standard III<sub>A</sub>. Timidity and shyness rendered John less ready in adapting himself to a new environment, but, this achieved, and his native ability asserting itself, he progressed with speed, and, in due course, followed the example of his older sister, and passed on to a Secondary School.

Tommy was irresponsible, irrepressible, irresistible. He looked like a cherub, but he loved mischief, and his sparkling eyes and bright face were always alive with fun. He was notably unskilful with his hands and his drawing was unusually immature, but he was very capable in intellectual and oral work. Unfortunately, however, he lacked at present Ronnie's steadiness of character, nor was he as well-circumstanced in his home life as either Ronnie or John, for his father was unemployed, and his mother had difficulty in keeping respectable the family of three boys and a small girl, of whom only one, a boy of seventeen, was at work.

With an Intelligence Quotient of 99.8, Edward, who was 9.1/12 years old, might be said to have been normal in intellectual ability, but he was very delicate. Rheumatic trouble, an excessively weak heart, and long illnesses, had involved him in lengthy periods of absence, which, combined with the fact that he was not to be expected to work strenuously in school-hours, had greatly hindered his progress. Nevertheless, his standard of attainment was as high as that of anybody in the class and was even higher than that of most, especially in written composition and spelling.

Arthur (8 years, 10 months, I Q 96 95), James (9 years,

2 months, I Q 91 57), Jack (8 years, 4 months, I Q 90 27) and Charlie (8 years, 10 months, I Q 90 09) combined varying degrees of slight mental inferiority with a common distaste for compulsory education. Arthur was quiet and self-absorbed and generally regarded as lazy. He had a particular antipathy to arithmetic, and was unwilling to undertake written work, but his ability in reading, though below the standard for a normal boy of his age, was among the best in the class. He was the youngest of a family of five, one of whom, a boy aged fifteen, had already followed his father into employment as a tool-maker. James was an only child, admitted to the school in the last term of the previous year. He, too, was quiet and very obedient in school, and in attainment closely resembled Arthur. Jack, promoted from Standard III during the first term of the year, was a pleasing boy, and a not too unwilling worker, whose strongest subject was arithmetic. He, like James, had no brothers or sisters, and his father was employed as a Corporation street-sweeper. Charlie's family was larger, for he had two younger brothers and a little sister. His father worked at the garage attached to the nearby clay-pits. Charlie himself was timid and nervous. He lacked self-confidence and failed to attack his work with courage or decision. In spelling he was conspicuously backward even among the boys of IIIs.

The dislike of these four for the life of the classroom was shared to an exaggerated degree by Henry, whose Intelligence Quotient of 86.08 placed him on the verge of pure dullness. His family was a product of one of the worst slum areas of the city, where his father was employed as a carter. His home environment was slovenly, dirty, and coarse, his mother, fierce and very truculent, and liable to fly into fits of hysteria. The only one of the remaining four children who was as yet old enough to attend school was dull in intelligence and backward in attainment, and, at nine years of age, was preparing to spend a second year in Standard I. Illness, truancy, and sheer neglect on the part of his parents had all contributed to Henry's long record of absenteeism, which included the seven months immediately previous to his admission to the school.

when he was said to be suffering from the effects of a severely scalded foot. Out of deference to his age he had at first been placed in Standard IVB, but his extreme backwardness quickly became apparent and he soon passed downward from IVB to IIIA, gravitating, at 12 3/12 years, inevitably to IIIB. He now presented a complex problem of innate dullness, extreme backwardness, and uncontrollable disposition, and his hatred of school-life with its routine of disciplines and punishments displayed itself in continual acts of resentful defiance, and in bitter antagonism to authority. He was a genuine 'tough nut'.

Neville and Donald stood on the borderline of definite dullness. Equal in age (9 years, 4 months) and of similar mental capacity (I Q's 84.5), they provided an illuminating contrast. On entering the school in the second term of the previous year (the former from another nearby school, and the latter from the same slum school which had already given us Henry), they had been placed in Standard II on grounds of age, not of attainment. Neville was fatherless, but his mother's struggles kept him and his eleven-year-old brother well provided for and decently brought up. He disliked school and was consistently unpunctual, his concentration was erratic and his behaviour 'fussy', but, frank and open in disposition, and unhampered by any lack of confidence, or by any sense of his own deficiencies, he made a strong contrast to Donald, whose pale, weakly face, protruding forehead, drooping shoulders, slight form, and listless attitude appealed to no instinct more than that of pity. For many dull boys, after daily release from the restrictions of the classroom, there still remain the comforts of home or the enjoyment of satisfying indulgence in those other activities which constitute their real happiness. With Donald it was different. His father was engaged in the not very lucrative occupation of manufacturing glass stoppers, but it was his mother who was responsible for the duty, ragged, abandoned condition of the three children. She was a slut, with a predilection for alcohol and undesirable company, and the occasions were by no means rare when, having, in the afternoon, consigned her youngest, unwashed,

to bed, she disappeared until late at night, leaving her two other children sometimes even without means of access to the house when they returned from school. It was not unusual for Donald to be left in charge of the baby while she spent a day in Blackpool, and it was a significant comment that he remained at home on a wet day for lack of shoes. But for the boy himself, the danger of this life lay less in its physical and external circumstances than in its effect upon his emotional state. His mother had no conception of the sense of injustice, the fierce resentment, seething under that forlorn exterior and surging up occasionally in seemingly inexplicable reactions, when the usually cowed child displayed an intensity of passion quite beyond her control. Such an occasion was the day when he was dragged, screaming, to school by a well-meaning greengrocer and a postman, the former of whom declared that he 'had met a few, but this was a ——!' When the angry mother and her incensed helpers had left, and the boy's tears had subsided, his story was quietly drawn from him. The trouble had begun with a broken promise. Instead of receiving the new pair of boots he had anticipated he had been given a curt order to hurry to school. His mind leapt immediately to the conclusion that his mother's purpose was to get him quickly out of the way to enable her to set off on one of her excursions. He envisaged a locked door and no food when he returned home. Full of resentment, he made off, ostensibly to school, actually to roam the streets, where, some time later, he was seen again by his mother. She pacified him with the pretence of taking him to his aunty's, but he soon found himself being led schoolwards. The realization of this piece of trickery caused another outburst of indignation, and the attraction to the scene of the greengrocer and the postman.

The brothers Roy and Kenneth were luckier in their parents, who valued their respectability and had striven against odds to maintain it. For a long period of years their father had suffered as a result of his experiences in the Great War, which had left him a legacy of acute neurasthenia and unemployment. For the length of five years he had completely

lost the power of speech. His wife, of healthy country stock, was one of the school cleaners. The concern of both was for the welfare of the four children who were obedient, well-mannered, and sensible, and their father sympathized with their childish interests and encouraged them in a great affection for animals. In school, it was not for want of concentration that the attainment of the two boys was so poor, and that Kenneth, now 9 8/12 years (and twelve months older than Roy) had spent two years in Standard III, for they were painstakingly slow, and impeccably neat, and never offered less than their best. But they were limited by their intelligence (Kenneth's of 82.92 and Roy's of 82.61), and achieved the most of which they were capable, at least under the system of teaching to which they were accustomed.

This could not be said of Harry, who, though of mental capacity similar to that of Roy and Kenneth, was now 11 3/12 years old, and could read none but the simplest words. In arithmetic and spelling he was similarly retarded. Both before and since his admittance to the school, about two years previously, delicate health had very seriously affected his attendance. He had been passed on, though regarded as a hopeless case, through Standards II and III, until, after a few weeks in Standard IV, and an official certification of his backwardness, he arrived, bathed in tears, in IIIb. It was small wonder that he viewed school without enthusiasm, but he was most willing to learn and was deeply distressed by his failures, he was capable at work with his hands, and was alive to the interests of the outside world. Both he and his elder brother benefited from the fact that since their father's employment was connected with the railway, they were able to travel more cheaply and to see more of the world than the majority of their companions, to whom Harry often told stories of his visits to relatives in London.

Fred (10 years, 7 months, I Q 81) was the youngest of a family of five. His father was a railway clerk, and his two brothers and his two sisters were all in good employment. But Fred was afflicted with a weakness of the spine and when the year was over, he was obliged to return to the Cripple

School from which he had come. He had had a strong desire to attend what he called a 'proper school', but, as was the case with Edward, it was impossible to exact from him any strenuous efforts in school work.

Albert (8 years, 4 months, I Q 79 3) came 'with shining morning face', for he was happy in a scrupulously clean home, but 'unwillingly to school', for his dullness made lessons troublesome. Of the strictly intellectual subjects, arithmetic and spelling were his greatest weaknesses, though his reading ran them a close second. He was not very gifted in the use of his hands, and his ability in drawing was much below normal. His one brother, in Standard V, was rather brighter than Albert, who, so far, appeared generally immature for his age. His father drove a police-van and ambulance, and was a hero in the estimation of the boys.

Dennis (I Q 79.2) was small for his nine years. Well-behaved and of innocent aspect in school, he had something of a criminal record outside. He associated with undesirable older companions and proved to be an apter pupil to them than to his teachers. He was one of the gang which broke into a greengrocery store and hid their spoils in a nearby disused hut where they retired on successive evenings to consume the fruits of their crime. Like Albert, he was excessively backward in arithmetic, and a period of two months' absence in the previous year had further hindered his general progress.

Arnold (I Q 78 1) never made use of a comb or a handkerchief. His adenoidal speech was attributed to laziness after a tonsil operation. He was taller than his 8 years, 7 months, but was thin and lanky, and walked with a slouching gait. He was always late for school. Such written work as he attempted was slovenly in character and well-plastered with ink, dirt, and greasy finger-marks. His father was employed in a chemical works in the slum district which the family had left when they came to live in the block of flats recently built near to the school.

The persistently slipshod nature of the work of Alan (9 2/12 years, I Q 78 03) was an indication of his character. His previous records all described him as careless and



inconsistent, poor in concentration, wilful and disobedient in conduct. He was often deceitful and dishonest, and instead of acknowledging a wrong action, habitually flung the blame on to a companion. His condition was probably accountable in part to a nervous state which had led to much previous absence, and in part to the vacillating nature of the discipline administered at home, where an over-stern father and an over-lenient mother were continually at cross-purposes, so that the boy learnt to deceive the one and manipulate the other.

Jim, still another product of the slum area previously mentioned, had escaped its worst influences, and, though an orphan, from his very early years, received the care of a mother from his eldest sister, aged twenty-three. She and the other two sisters went out to work, consequently Jim was consistently late for school. When admitted to IIIb he had just concluded a period of four months' exclusion for skin disease. He was exactly nine years of age, with an I.Q. of 77, very poor in attainment, and especially so in arithmetic. By nature he appeared apathetic and seemed to lack personality.

David (8 11/12 years, I.Q. 76.7) was always in the way. He rushed to open the door, to pick things up, to do odd jobs, regardless of whether or not his help was desired or appreciated. His health was good, but his stunted growth, his pale face, his head carried slightly to one side, and his owl-like glasses make him a quaint figure. Weak in concentration, restless in conduct, only drawing, in which he was capable without displaying any imaginative power, could hold his interest for an appreciable time. He frankly disliked school, where he was regarded as incorrigibly lazy.

Teddy (9 5/12 years, I.Q. 76.5), whose father was delicate and unemployed, was one of seven children of whom the eldest was thirteen. An eighth child, born during Teddy's year in IIIb, survived only through spending her earliest days in an incubator. But Teddy himself enjoyed tolerably good health. He was pleasant and tractable, but restless and talkative in school.

Jeffrey (8 11/12 years) had one exceptional talent, which relieved the monotony of a mental dullness about equal to

that of Teddy. He was very poor in all written work, but could express himself remarkably in drawing. He differed further from most of his companions in that he lived an intense imaginative life of his own. In class, he rarely attended to the lesson, but was generally found to be occupied with some vital personal problem, and would frequently leave his seat and astonish his teacher by asking some intelligent question on an entirely unrelated subject. Apart from drawing, he found his greatest pleasure in history, from which subject most of his queries sprang. His reading, though not satisfactory for his age, placed him among the more advanced section of the class, but his haphazard written work, his inaccurate sums, his confused composition and his apparent tendency to abstraction, brought him frequently into disgrace in the classroom.

One month younger than Jeffrey was Joe, a healthy, lively, talkative. He was an only child with an excellent working-class home background. But in spite of regular attendance during the whole of his school life, his Intelligence Quotient of 76.3 had not allowed him to make much progress in the Three R's, except in arithmetic, to which he brought accuracy in simple processes. His written composition displayed total lack of logical thought, but his keen interest in things about him, and his ready tongue, gave him good advantages in oral work. In drawing, though he could not usually achieve Jeffrey's high standard, he was decidedly capable, and gave evidence of some fertility of imagination.

Sidney's mental age was similar to that of Joe, but in all else the two boys bore no resemblance to one another. Sidney, who was a year the elder, was quiet and shy, had none of Joe's garrulousness and exuberance, and was very delicate in appearance. After much absence during his years in the Infants' Department, he had arrived, already very backward, in Standard I of the Juniors, where he had remained for two years before proceeding, though quite unfit for promotion, through IIB to IIIB, where he now was at 9 11/12 years. Tubercular glands, throat trouble, running ears (with resultant defective hearing) combined, during this time, with an attack

of chicken-pox and an operation for adenoids, to produce still further long periods of absence, and many incidental visits to the clinic. As a result of such disjointed attendance at school, his formal education had scarcely begun, but he possessed a sober steadiness of character from which he might have profited had his physical condition allowed him to settle down to a period of unbroken school life. He was, of course, extremely backward in all subjects, but was especially weak in reading.

The experience of Raymond (9 8/12 years, I Q 75 6) had been similar, but his trouble was rooted in general poor health with an excessive susceptibility to colds and catarrhal affections. A septic hand, for which he had been treated in hospital, had taken its toll of his run-down condition, obliging him subsequently to pass many months in a convalescent home. He was, in consequence, even more retarded than Sidney. He was also a less mature character, and, in physique and facial appearance, suggested more vividly the mental dullard. The vacancy of his expression seemed to be emphasized by his protruding front teeth, while wiry jet-black hair growing low on his forehead enhanced the general oddity of his looks. In attainments, he was even less advanced than Sidney, but he was pleasant and friendly and almost too quiet and well-behaved in the classroom, for when his interest flagged, he did not fall into mischief in the manner of his companions, but was apt to sit back in serene indifference, gazing, apparently unthinkingly, into space.

Stanley (9 6/12 years, I Q 75 4) paid a daily visit to the clinic for treatment for ear-trouble. This was disastrous to his progress. He had already spent two years in Standard II, but was still extremely backward, and particularly so in arithmetic. The chief virtue of his work was to be found in the conspicuous neatness of all his written efforts, though one would willingly have sacrificed some of this perfection for more solid and useful attainments. He was a somewhat timid boy, with a quick, nervous manner of speech, and an inability to concentrate on school-work, but he was used to good home influences and the firm but sensible discipline of his father,

an electrician Stanley was an only child, and he and his father were close companions, their weekly visit to the swimming-baths providing one of the boy's chief enjoyments.

Still another victim of ill-health was Sam, the third oldest boy in the class. He was, in addition, very lucky to have preserved his sight since a thoughtless companion had flung handfuls of lime at his face, causing severe injury to his eyes and involving him in a lengthy absence from his school in the slum district from which, like Henry and others, he came to us. His father was unemployed, his two older brothers, aged twenty-five and thirty years\*respectively, were married, and his eighteen-year-old sister worked at 'making cold-cure tablets'. He had a third brother, ten years of age, who was in Standard IV, and, though by no means clever, could not justifiably be classified as backward. His mother must have been in a poor state of health, for, twelve months after Sam left IIIa, she suddenly collapsed and died in the street when pushing home the week's supply of coal. After one term in Standard III, Sam had been removed to IIb. Still making no progress, he was officially tested for mental deficiency, and pronounced on the border-line of feeble-mindedness, a verdict confirmed, when he came in the following year to IIIb, by the results of testing which showed an I Q. of 71. He was now 11 1/12 years of age, and could not accurately identify the letters of the alphabet, though his attainments in arithmetic, the strongest of his intellectual subjects, were fair, and his handwork was definitely good. He accepted his position as a dunce, but was very willing to learn if a way could be found of teaching him. Obviously he was so far retarded that no teacher of a normal class had ever adequate time to devote to his shortcomings, and, like the lame boy of Hamelin, he was always left limping behind. Consequently his self-confidence had been almost irtrievably shattered, and he never found an opportunity of displaying the valuable qualities of willingness, humour, and reliability, which were to become evident at a later date, when he proved himself an outstandingly capable monitor, and exercised a steady, unobtrusive influence on the class.

Keith (9 10/12 years, I Q 70 8), remarkable for a nasal accent and an abounding self-complacency, was the youngest of a family of ten. He was also a proud uncle. His father was a tram-guard, and his brothers and sisters were in occupations ranging from animal-keeper at the local zoo to assistant in a nearby confectioner's, while his mother, though subject to minor breakdowns, undertook occasional charring. Keith found little pleasure in school life, though his attendance was regular as a matter of course, and his standard of attainment, after two years in Standard II, inspired the belief that if he had ability to make any better progress it could be only through some new method of teaching.

Douglas (8 7/12 years) regarded one askance, as though trying to see round the crack across one lens of his spectacles. He was the youngest of a family of four boys, and his father was a concrete-maker, to which one sometimes unkindly attributed the impenetrable quality of his son's head, for he, too, with an I Q of 71, was only just removed from the classification of feeble-mindedness. He shared Keith's freedom from ill-health, but had suffered the break in his career experienced by all those who had emigrated from the often-mentioned slum area. He was very backward in all written work, but had some ability in oral English.

Frank, aged 9.4/12 years, had the low receding forehead and the lack-lustre eye so often associated with mental dullness and delinquency. His parents were separated—'for nothing wrong, only for bad temper and drink', declared his mother, who added that 'he was a nice man, but "soft", and would indulge the children'. She, herself, was dependent upon a Public Assistance allowance, and suffered from tubercular trouble. Her eldest boy, aged fifteen, had been placed in a remand home. Frank himself mixed with the worst type of companion and indulged in truancy and petty thieving, while his younger sister, aged six, contributed her quota to the sum of family delinquency, when, incited by Frank and his friends, she stole articles from the counters of a nearby chain-store. The baby, aged three, would, no doubt, continue the tradition in due course. There was no school subject in which Frank

displayed a promise of ability or in which he appeared to take an interest

Richard's father had died in a Mental Home, and Richard still recalled many of his unbalanced and often cruel actions before his removal from the house, several years previously. The boy had endured many undeserved thrashings, and had been deprived of most of his legitimate childish pleasures. His father had frequently spent nights away from home, returning at length in the company of what Richard described as 'horrible' men. As time went on, his condition grew worse, he began to take fits, and was finally removed to a suitable institution, from which he made an unsuccessful attempt to escape. Not long afterwards, he died, or, to use Richard's own words, 'God took him away'. Richard himself, with an I.Q. of 66.7, was undeniably feeble-minded, and his career had been further marred by nervous and kidney troubles, and by attacks of jaundice, diphtheria, and scarlet fever. In class he was often restless and disobedient, and not always completely trustworthy, yet he had some very attractive qualities, was helpful and usually well-meaning, and not infrequently gave evidence of a fund of common sense. He was an only child, and, not unnaturally, considering the circumstances of his history, was the main interest of his mother's life. Not fully realizing his deficient mental capacity (though she was aware that he had 'a funny sort of mind'), she was very anxious about his progress, shared his activities, and gave him toys of an educational nature. She could not, however, alter his aversion from school, and he was often in trouble at home on account of unsatisfactory reports from his teachers. As the result of all his circumstances, his general standard of attainment was deplorable, yet he possessed some ability in drawing, though this lay rather in a power to draw his objects well than in a display of creative imagination, while his interest in animals, fostered at home, found some room for expression in lessons concerned with Nature Study.

George, who brings to an end this brief preliminary survey of the class, was an enigma. Incredibly diffident, he could hardly be persuaded to utter a word. His sole response to a

well-intentioned query was a nod of the head or a monosyllable, prefaced by a long, suspicious stare at the questioner. Thus, though, with an I Q of 64.7, in mental capacity he was not far below Richard, he gave an impression of a much greater degree of feeble-mindedness, being incapable of expressing himself in oral subjects, and lacking any skill in work with his hands, though, of the two boys, in reading (when he could be induced to read), and in spelling, he was slightly the better. George, who was now nine years of age, had lost his father four years earlier in an accident at the brick-works where he had been employed. His mother's mentality was poor, and the four children (of whom the eldest was sixteen and worked in an occupation involving sewing) were dirty and neglected in a home governed by ignorance and poverty.

This, then, was Standard IIIb, as miscellaneous an assemblage of boys as one might hope to find, but a group bound together by the one characteristic of its prevailing mental dullness. Three boys, only, escaped this limitation (for even Edward, with an I Q of 99.8, could be called only barely normal); two were actually feeble-minded, and, of the remainder, the great majority were not merely of slightly inferior mentality, but indisputably dull. They were, at the same time, by no means *uniformly* dull, so that the problem was not only that of teaching seemingly unteachable boys, but also that of teaching a group with a range of mental dullness considerably wider than the range of capacity likely to be found among the children of a normal class. This dullness was, moreover, complicated further by every kind of outside circumstance, and it was only by means of careful intelligence-testing that it became possible to find guidance in grading the boys' innate mental capacity, and so to distinguish how far an individual's present attainment might be attributable to inborn dullness, and how far to the external accidents of his life. Neville and Donald, for example, equal in age, differed considerably in all-round attainment, but were revealed by testing to be of similar mental capacity. The

disparity in their work was the result, not so much of a difference in their innate ability as of the different circumstances and events of their lives. The attainments of Harry at the beginning of the year would have put him a long distance behind Kenneth and Roy, yet the results of testing placed them approximately on a par, and the progress made by Harry during the months which followed amply justified that assumption.

As for the standard of attainment throughout the class, even a most cursory examination was sufficient to reveal that it fell very far short of that usually accepted for the third standard of the Junior School—far short, indeed, even of that expected of the usual 'B' section of that grade. Even Ronnie, Tommy, and John, white sheep in a herd of black ones, were, in view of their promotion directly from Standard I, only a little more advanced than the normal boys now entering Standard II. Henry was by age qualified for Standard VI, but, even in arithmetic, his strongest subject, he was able to perform only the most straightforward operations appropriate to boys in Standard III. A Standard II reading-book was too difficult for him to manage with any fluency, from which it may be judged that his spelling was still weaker, while his efforts at written composition were negligible, a description true, indeed, of the composition of the entire class, the sole exceptions being Ronnie, John, and Tommy, and to a lesser extent, Edward, who, in spite of his record of absence, showed some degree of promise. For the others, the obstacles to composition of handwriting, spelling and punctuation, the difficulty of expressing themselves adequately in words, the lack of power of logical thinking, and the fact that they had usually nothing to say on the given theme, were enough to nullify all their efforts, with the result that, while boys like Alan, Jeffrey, Neville, Donald, Arnold, and Joe produced a page of incoherent nonsense, one was lucky to receive from boys like Dennis, Jim, Teddy, Kenneth, and Roy one or two arduously contrived sentences.

A similar kind of criticism applied to the work in arithmetic, either it was haphazard and inaccurate, or painfully slow and



limited, while a large proportion of the class, including Stanley, Donald, Frank, Richard, Dennis, Raymond, Kenneth, David, Jim, and Sydney had not yet grasped how to perform the simplest operations of adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing.

In reading, Tommy, John, and Ronnie could, without effort, tackle a Standard III Reader, but Sam, Sydney, and Raymond were unable to read at all. The remainder of the class struggled with a Standard I Reader with varying degrees of efficiency, while several, including Donald (whose work was otherwise of lamentably poor quality), Teddy, Jeffrey, Arthur, Dennis, Jack, and Alan found a Standard II Reader not entirely beyond their scope. In spelling, the standard of attainment was inevitably very poor. The grotesque efforts of boys like Harry, Donald, Richard, Keith, Henry, Raymond, Jim, and Sam, could hardly be dubbed spelling, while all, except the three brightest, who were easily capable of dealing with words appropriate to Standard III, found great difficulty in this subject.

Such, briefly, was the position as regards the purely intellectual attainments of the class. How far did it represent the maximum achievement of which the boys were capable? Probably, in very few cases, for it was a small minority of the class which had eluded the retarding influences of absenteeism, ill-health, unfavourable environment, removals, or defects of character and temperament, either singly or in combination.

Indeed, as details gradually accumulated to build up a case-history for each boy, one fact became increasingly apparent—the problem offered by every child was emphatically an individual problem, the present position of each was the direct result of his own particular past history, different in large or small measure from that of all the other boys. Therefore, Standard IIIb could not be conceived *en masse*. Clearly, before attempting to teach, it was necessary to discard the accepted fundamental idea of the ‘class’ as a unit in which the boys were bound together by similarities of age, ability, and attainment, and where all its members aimed at reaching a certain point in a given syllabus in a prescribed time, in

readiness to pass on in a compact body to the next stage. For how was it possible for such varying intelligences all to arrive even approximately in the same place at the same time? How, for instance, with even the most prodigious efforts, could George and Richard be levelled up to the standard of Ronnie, John, and Tommy, in twelve months, when their respective Intelligence Quotients made it obvious that it would not be practicable in a lifetime?

And why, in any case, should such an objective be set? Even under the most favourable of circumstances, George and Richard and their dull companions would never attain to more than a limited achievement in these subjects depending so largely on sheer intelligence, and, undoubtedly the future contribution which they would make to life would involve physical skills and manual dexterities rather than activities making severe claims upon the intellect. The present occupations of their fathers and of their older brothers and sisters gave an indication of the type of employment into which they themselves might be expected to fall. They included manufacturers of tools and of glass stoppers, makers of bricks and of concrete, a garage hand, the driver of a police-van, a tram-guard, a railway worker, and even an animal-keeper and a street-cleaner. Only three, a railway clerk, a butcher, and the proprietor of a sweet-shop (of whom two were the fathers of the brighter boys, John and Ronnie) were engaged in an occupation demanding any degree of intellectual ability. Yet here were these lads, toiling and grinding at the very subjects for which by nature they were least fitted, and of which, in the future, they would have comparatively small need, while, even worse, every one was so occupied in this thankless pursuit, that no one ever paused to find out if there was anything useful which the boys could do, the encouragement of which might be of real value to them in either the present or the future. Meanwhile, they themselves had become so discouraged by failures, or so averse to uncongenial work, that, at best, they were merely resigned, and, at worst, they were thoroughly miserable. The resulting insidious lack of interest permeated every aspect of their school

life, and nullified all the strenuous efforts of the teacher, committed to the unprofitable task of flogging a dead horse. It was a difficult matter to make the class pull together; there was no unity of spirit between teacher and taught, but only a vicious circle of cross-purposes, frayed tempers, and punishments, leading back to a still more obstinate lack of interest.

My starveling bull!  
Ah woe is me!  
In pastures full,  
How lean is he!

One could hope to achieve nothing in such an atmosphere. Without the co-operation of the boys, the best-laid schemes would be predestined to inevitable failure. Moreover, it was impossible to escape the conviction that all the fault was not on the side of the 'opposition'. One does not give beef-steak to a baby, yet the school seemed to be offering a diet of a very indigestible kind of nourishment, and administering it by main force to a victim whose wiser instinct bade him reject it. There was a need for some new diet, whatever it might be it could not conceivably result in more acute indigestion than the old.

The curriculum did, of course, include subjects other than the Three R's, but the tendency was to regard these merely as sidelines, as a slight relief from the main and serious business of Reading, Writing, and 'Rithmetic. Each week brought its Drawing lesson, with its set subject, and its Handwork lesson, with its square box, table-mat, or book-mark. There were, also, the 'Oral' lessons, History, Geography, Nature Study, during which the main function of the boys was to listen while the teacher talked, and to answer questions when she had concluded. But all this work was stereotyped, orthodox, and uninspiring. It was imposed from above. It taught the boys what it was supposed they ought to learn, without reference to their natural reactions or inclinations. It allowed no scope for their own initiative, it kept them passive when they should have been active, dull when they should have been enthusiastic, and barren when they should have been creative. Thus

natural impulses were stifled and found their outlet in restless behaviour and talkativeness, inattention, and boredom

It was plain that school life was not meeting the needs of these boys, nor would it do so without a new approach on the part of the teacher and a new spirit among the children, for whom the first essential was that they should somehow find happiness in the classroom, that they should take pleasure in coming to school. It was after spending several weeks in IIIb that Keith remarked, 'I like Fridays, Miss, because of 'ymns and singing—it jollies yer up, like'. If only there could be achieved a fundamental 'jollyng up' of the entire life of this class, who could tell what benefits might not accrue, what progress might not be made? Nearly four centuries have passed since Rhodes, a man of sense, if an indifferent poet, put his finger upon a significant truth in the following crude lines—

I would reform both youth and age, if  
anything be amiss  
To you I will show my mind, reform  
ye where need is

He might have been writing with his thoughts on the problem of Standard IIIb

## CHAPTER II

### LETTERS

'A LITTLE thou knowest, but not much,' sighed the great-hearted Brown Bear of Jungle Book, to Mowgli. 'See, O Bagheera, they never thank their teacher. Not one small wolfling has ever come back to thank old Baloo for his teaching.'

I was luckier than old Baloo, for it was the thanks of one of the 'small wolfings' of IIIb which set in motion a revolution in the life of the class.

The first few weeks of the term had passed, under accepted school conditions, in observation of the boys, in testing their capacity and attainment, in gathering information about them, and, in an attempt to learn something about the nature of the problem of Dullness and Backwardness. Meanwhile, of the intellectual subjects, greatest emphasis had been placed upon reading as the most valuable and most teachable, and a little improvement had manifested itself as the result of a determined attack. The old dull routine of group-reading, in which the boys were frequently struggling with books too difficult for them, had been abandoned, and all the small, easy, colourful stories which the school could muster had been made available to the class. The better readers gave assistance to the poorer ones, often working privately with them in the main hall, and each boy kept a record of the stories he had read. This change of routine had aroused considerable excitement and created in many of the boys an active desire to read, while releasing the teacher for more individual work with the most backward of all, and with those who, through much absence, had never received secure foundations on which to build their progress. A class library had been collected and silent reading was freely encouraged, while the boys were allowed to draw pictures about the stories they liked best.

It was at this point that Albert, exercising his own initiative, retrieved from the waste-paper basket the gun which an



exasperated member of the staff had taken from him and dropped there. After being reprimanded in school, he took home an untrue version of the incident, upon which his mother came to ascertain the actual facts. The result was the establishment of a happy co-operation between teacher and parent, and on the part of Albert, to whom the error of his action was pointed out in a reasonable fashion, evidence of a new desire to make progress. Such small incidents may often influence a child's attitude and conduct and sometimes open up the way, as in Albert's case, to unexpected developments, if the teacher is quick to seize the opportunity. Several days later I was the astonished recipient of two notes, one of which was addressed *to mis tallyare*, and read, *Theanks for lornine me lesen and sums*. It was concluded by a sum in addition of pounds, shillings, and pence, attempted twice, each time wrong. The second note was a picture, presumably of Albert himself in the uniform of the Boys' Brigade (though adorned with a beard) and superscribed *wen I went to the begad I dril wons mowre*, the last two words being crossed out and replaced by *more*, *Once*. This was a golden opportunity not to be lost. An immediate reply, in wording carefully graded to the writer's ability in reading was therefore put into an envelope, and fixed with a drawing-pin to his desk, in readiness for his return to the classroom after the morning break. His astonishment at the receipt of a note equalled the teacher's at the receipt of his. Delighted, he asked if he might read it to the class, who bubbled with interest. Albert promised a reply. He agreed to a suggestion that he should place his answer in an old, fair-sized cardboard box which had been left, by a lucky chance, on the table. Immediately and simultaneously, several voices cried out to suggest that a slit should be cut in the box, so that the letter could 'really be posted'. The ubiquitous David was on the spot in a trice, and the operation was performed, only to be followed by a further suggestion, that it would be good to have 'some red paper to make the box look like a pillar-box'. Then came David's idea, 'let's make a real pillar-box'—a proposition hailed enthusiastically by all. I drew attention to the fact that, in order to make

a successful model, a close examination of an actual pillar-box would be necessary to discover its proportions and the details of its construction. From the surge of volunteers, four were chosen, and, at the conclusion of afternoon school, Arnold, Teddy, Neville, George, and a panting teacher scurried up the street and round the corner to the nearby post-box. Teddy and Neville spontaneously took the lead in the proceedings, Arnold, commissioned to write down the measurements, actually felt for the first time in his school career an active need to be able to spell the words he required. But George, reserved and taciturn as always, automatically stood by with his hands in his pockets, until, at a judicious suggestion that he should hold one end of the tape-measure, while the others took it round the pillar-box, he was drawn into the activity. Indeed, as one grew to understand George better, one realized that, in spite of his apparent lethargy, he keenly desired to 'be in things', but his emotions were always suppressed and his spontaneous reactions inhibited. Meanwhile, the first essential in dealing with him seemed to be to gain his confidence and to multiply his opportunities for voluntary self-expression without his being aware that he was the object of special consideration.

What zeal these four brought to their self-imposed task! How minutely they observed and how carefully they sketched the details of the pillar-box! How they argued over the accuracy of their measurements, checked and re-checked them to make sure they were correct! And by how much the concentration, energy, and enthusiasm now displayed exceeded anything they had ever before thrown into a piece of school work.

Meanwhile, in the morning, Albert's reading of his letter had engendered activity of another kind. Keith asked if he might write a letter too, and the affirmative inspired a general demand that everybody should do the same. Papers were distributed at once, and all set to work with no further instructions than for each to write his own address and the date in the top right-hand corner. One boy wondered what should be done for envelopes, and another suggested that we



should make them. The usually obstreperous Henry now clamoured to be allowed to demonstrate, and soon every one had produced a simple envelope from an 8-inch square of Handwork paper. This piece of Handwork fell most fortunately because of its easiness, and the resulting sense of confidence which all gained from a successful result. The designing of stamps for the letters led to a discussion during which the majority of the class learnt for the first time what were the correct stamps in use for various postal packages.

The cardboard box serving temporarily as a post-box was fixed to the wall with drawing-pins by Richard who, after discovering how to spell the word 'LETTERS', printed it neatly below the slit. The individual missives, when completed, placed in their envelopes and sealed with a dab of glue, were duly posted. David asked to be given the position of postman, and suitable hours of collection for future mails were decided upon. He further declared that a 'sorter' was necessary—'like Littlewood's'—and Jeffrey, appointed to the post, concluded the morning by insisting on remaining behind 'to draw wriggly lines across the stamps to stop any one using them again'.

So came to a close a morning of a kind unprecedented in the lives of the boys of IIIB—a morning when they moved freely about the classroom, instead of being obliged to remain in their seats, a morning of mutual help instead of surreptitious cheating, of eager enjoyment instead of clogging boredom, a morning when it was difficult to get the boys out of the classroom, in contrast to the usual difficulty of getting them in, and, above all, a morning which left every one with a lively desire to come back to school in the afternoon. It did not occur to Henry, usually so unco-operative, to be astonished at finding himself in unopposed charge of the class, teaching his companions how to do something which he could do and they could not. But it would have astonished any member of the staff who might have entered the classroom. David, accustomed to being scolded for a superfluity of well-intentioned but misdirected activity, did not stay to reflect on the fact that at last he had found a legitimate outlet for his

energies, and Jeffrey did not realize that he had emerged from his own isolated snail-shell and had plunged into the general bustle of the life of the class. Everybody had, in fact, flung off the garments of ennui and indifference, and was swimming blithely in a boisterous sea of purposeful activity.

The effect upon the more disreputable and indifferent boys was amazing, but none of their expressions of pleasure was more gratifying than that which escaped, involuntarily, from the pale-faced, neglected Donald as we descended the staircase at the end of the morning.

*Donald* Oh, miss! Poor Charlie!

*Me* Why, what has happened to him?

*Donald* He's not long come back from t' clinic and 'e's missed all the excitement!

Poor Donald—he had a great capacity for intense enjoyment, but the occasions were rare in his squalid life when he could exercise it. The letter which he had dropped into the extemporized pillar-box testified further to his pleasure.

*I must thank you for the lesen we have don this weeck. I wish you a very happi weeck end. Please lett us be ass good ass it was this weeck.*

These first letters contained much worthy of criticism, if one had cared to approach them in that spirit. The mistakes in details of heading and addressing were varied and often amusing, but it was not difficult to find a remedy for this kind of error. Two large sheets of coloured pastel paper and some coloured chalks made bright posters showing how to head and begin a letter, and how to address the envelope. These, pinned up prominently on the wall, had their effects on future efforts. In many cases, too, enthusiasm and excitement had tended to negative cool thinking—English was written as it was spoken, punctuation was frequently disregarded, and spelling neglected, though, on the whole, handwriting was good. But the great value of these first letters lay in the stirring up of a real, lively enthusiasm. Every letter was an enterprise voluntarily undertaken, and the voluntary application of pen to paper by the members of IIIb was a phenomenon seldom witnessed. For the first time the boys

were animated by a vital spirit of active co-operation with their teacher, and the bond of friendliness now created persisted throughout the whole of the year. Many of the letters concerned themselves with requests for the teacher's birthday, hopes that she would like the letters and that she would be happy, regrets for being 'a bad lad', expressions of pleasure at the new developments in the classroom, and demands that they, like Albert, should receive answers to their notes. Albert's own effort, an improvement on his first read.

Dear Miss Taylor.  
 Tank you very very much  
 for the letters with the drowing  
 pin in. and I hop you have  
 a very nise time when you  
 go on your Holorday.

Albert's second note

*Dear Miss Taylor. Tank you very very much for the letter with the drowing pin in and I hop you have a very nise time when you go on your Holorday*

Within a couple of days each letter had received an individual answer written with a definite object, and delivered through the classroom post. One boy's request that he might be allowed to imitate Albert and read his reply to the class, caused a universal desire to do likewise, and resulted in a considerable amount of reading-practice and a keen interest in the subject-matter of everybody else's letters. Nobody 'lost his place' in these 'reading lessons', for everybody found his attention too securely held for wandering.

From this time the postal system flourished increasingly. It appointed monitors, it dispatched birthday cards, it delivered orders, made known requests, and satisfied desires,

while more and more it provided a vehicle for insight into the minds and interests of the writers themselves, and proved that, dull and unresponsive as the boys might have been in the classroom, they were indeed no less alive than their normal or clever companions, but that, under the uncongenial régime in school, they were different beings from their out-of-school selves. Keith's spelling and his punctuation may have marred his expression, but could not conceal from the reader the pride of an uncle in his little nephew whose adventurous nature carried him into the local cinema, free of charge, as described in one of his earliest letters

*I want to tell you about my little nephew for you will laugh when I tell you what he does. He goes and gets in the picher for nuffing but when he comes to his grandmothers she said hoo pad for you to go to the pichers he said no one pad for me so my mother sent him home.*

It is doubtful whether Keith had ever before written two sides of a page of composition.

Roy was less eloquent than Keith and could not write at such length, but he was very fond of the family pets and especially of Rac, the dog.

*Dear Miss Taylor if you want to know how the pets are they are in good candishan of course my father gives Rac a candishan powder that stops it having a hot nous (=nose) I must say it likes tea.*

There could have been very few events which occurred in Harry's life during his twelve months in IIIB which were not recorded in his letters. His topics ranged over a visit to the Hippodrome, the adventures of the cats, Tiddles and Sammy, his success and non-success with a pair of home-made stilts, the city's pageant, visits to Strines and to Rhyl, his own sojourn in a convalescent home, and the activities of the concert party of which his sister was a member. On nearly all of these subjects he developed a series of letters, each of which would be worth quotation, even when not for its manner, at least for its matter, and reveals, even in a boy of subnormal mentality, a mind alert and alive with interest. Here are some of his efforts. The first two concern his stilts.

*Just a line or two to tell you about my stilts. On sturday I made a pear of stilts and when I got on them it snaped I mended them*

*again and before long they brock again and this morning I mended them and there is not mutch chance of them bracking again they are very strong becaus I put plenty of nails in them*

His hopes, however, were ill-founded, for the stults soon let him down once more:

*You told me that you wold right back soon and I am quite ready for your letter and in the letter that I sent last night I told you about my stults was quite fearm but it snaped again but my father said he wold bring me some pesies of wood from work*

All seems now to have gone well, for he turned next to a new topic, the concert party.

*I have been wanting to tell you somthing for a long time and I have got the chance at last it is about our concert party there are foure of them, one is a singer and the other is a dancer and she plays a pronocordion and the other is a comedion and the other is a soubrette. The singer is Billy, the dancer is John (i.e. Joan) comedion is ken the soubrette is mery*

A few days later, this was followed by another on the same subject, which ran

*I have been wanting to tell you many things, but I havent had time to right any letters The consert party that I was telling you about in my last letter thear are goying to many playses and clobs When the sercus was at — our jone how is the danser whent to danse at tuder cafe and the typeropewalker had her fotergraf taken with jone*

One cannot but admire Harry's gallant efforts at spelling the difficult words in these two letters, and welcome his praiseworthy determination to get to the end of his subject in spite of obstacles!

Tiddles and Sammy were the two cats, but unfortunately Tiddles died, and Sammy felt his absence

*now our other cat is deid we ar taking care of sammy sometimes he gose out and looks for the other cat Tiddles yousto come up stars at night and come in bead with ous On sunday my mother went to my artis round the coner and she sawer our sammy plying with a littel kitten under a moter car*

His concluding letter on the topic of the cats suggested that Sammy was now growing reconciled to the loss of his companion:

*Now I think I am at the end of my series of letters about Sammy and tiddels Now I will think about some more things what Sammy and tiddels did Tiddels was very mard and every time my dad came in she jumps up on his shoulder And sammy lays in curious ways and is all ways me-owing and he is getting mard to*

As the year progressed, Harry's writing showed, in addition to an increased power of expression, a growing mastery of the mechanics of composition His spelling improved enormously and his use of full stops and capital letters became at last almost faultless Of his visit to Strines he wrote

*One friday we went to Strines for a day we had a jolly time all for six pence and we had dinner and tea and we had a bag of sweets when we went home We went in the woods and climbed trees with the schools ropes and we went a walk to the mall we went inside and before I close my letter I want to tell you that I am goying to rhyl to the convelesant home.*

He described his short stay in the convalescent home in the first letter written after his return

*I am very glad I went to rhyl I did not think it would be good as that We went out three times a day and we went on the sands Some times we went a walk right along the front We went to bed at half past seven, and got up at seven o'clock. We got good food and we wear cerd for and looked after My Mother asked me did the nurses knock us about I said we knock them about on the sands. We go to chapel every morning and every night and have a surves Once we went in the salt warter Baths It is warm and it is not to deep.*

Finally, it is difficult to refrain from quoting the following letter (written several months before the above) not only as an indication of the improvement now apparent in the quality of his work, but also for the unconscious humour of one of its observations:

*last Night I saw you in — Park you were playing tennise I was on my way to see the pagente they were reasersin the man at the muck (=muck) was making fun with the ladies and they were singing O God our help I went with the laday who had a baby he was one and half year old he was craling of (crawling off) and he was shouting*

It was clear that no teacher need ever have been in doubt

about the interests which animated Harry's mind, for, given the opportunity to state them freely, he made it plain that he was intensely concerned in every circumstance which befell him

Stanley's letters did not cover so wide a field, but the activities of the kittens and of the two cats, Joey and Darkey, and the precarious lives of his goldfish provided him with inexhaustible material. Here are three typical examples from the work of a boy who had previously been unable to summon enough concentration to carry him through the task of writing a composition, and who, even had he had the will, was usually devoid of ideas which he might set down on paper. Now, like Harry, he began to appreciate the interest of small details and to draw on everyday experiences for his material—

*I have lost one of my kittens and the other morning when I was coming down to stair I heard the kitten creading in the boiler. My other goldfish has died Darkey play with string and other things. Darkey play with the other cats in the streets.*

We hear more of Darkey in the next letter:

*At home I have (he really means 'had') two gold fish. And all cat like gold fish you now I have two cat and their name are Joey and darkey And darkey has got one of my gold fish and he is trying to get the other gold fish On Sunday I was playing round the moter car and I left the door open and darkey came running out and he tore my sock And I run round after him and he run under the car.*

And still another letter told of a minor disaster

*Last Sunday we when to Buxton And we left to (=the) meat on the table Darkey and tiddles (named after Harry's cat) got on the table The two kittens got on a chair onto the table Diden they have a good time When we got home from Buxton on the table was bones The to cat and the to kittens was fast asleep in the boxes. The bird was fast asleep*

Neville's earliest letters reflected his tendency to pour out his thoughts in a careless, often disorderly flow, as in this one, written soon after Albert's first note:

*I have been a good boy in the line and albert been a good boy in line and so have all the boys When Albert read that note out it gave me a shock because he read it out so nice*

Similarly defective was the description of the gifts he received for Christmas

*What I got for christmas was a racing came of jockeys in a ring and I got a carage and six moters and in the carage on the top of the roof is a battery and a buld not a buld that you grow in a garden a buld that lights up. I got a pair of bed slippers and I got a pair of boots and I got a eletric train a lines.*

But, before long, he started to employ a greater measure of control which began to be apparent, for example, in the letter describing some of the activities of the Cub Pack to which he had recently belonged.

*When I was in the Cubs I had some fun There was for (=four) poles we used to play games round them Then we played another game we used to line up and the greys used to chase the reds The blues used to chase the whites.*

On a later occasion, immediately after a school holiday, came two letters in quick succession, written on plain paper on which he had carefully ruled out the guiding lines in pencil. In the first he recounted some details of the holiday

*In my holiday I went no where On monday morning I went in the park to play a game of cricket First time we lost but we played them again but we won then I came home and I had a game of snake A lady who lives across the road went to Bonnie Scotland for a week when she came back she bought me a pencil case with a ruler and a pen and two pencils.*

The receipt of this present was still holding his attention in the second letter, which said.

*I am pleased this week with myself because I went to the pictures last night I had something bought for me thats a pencil case from bonnie scotland send me a letter back telling me if you like the letters or not*

The majority of Jeffrey's letters had to be read by the light of intuition, for his meaning was generally obscured by his personal notions of spelling and the absence of punctuation. But everything he wrote was dominated by an energetic interest and keen desire for action. He seized eagerly upon a new idea, and demanded to be allowed to participate in every fresh enterprise, so that he ceased to be merely the



dreamer of forbidden dreams now that he had found a field where his dreams could be realized and converted into concrete action. The first of all his letters reflected his fondness for drawing

*I am going to dring (=draw) a picher it has a saler with a gun and a long string of bulites and I am going to dring the Navy*

The same evening, at home, he wrote his comments on the activities of the day

*I hope you make the puller-box so that hevrey one can put there letter in the one (=the lesson) that we had was very nise could we have the numbers on the frunt of our descats (=desks)*

Though this suggestion that every desk should be numbered was not adopted, it was one illustration of the prevailing eagerness of Jeffrey's mind. 'Pancake Day' was not forgotten.

*I hope you now it is pan-cake day dont bird (=burn) the pan-cake. My mother will be home to make ouwer pan-cake.*

And on the next day came another note:

*I hope you got the letter what said about pan-cakes and dont forget about it could me and KI draw a picture about ships I hope you will let us do it*

Some boys wrote many letters, some not so many, but all were written spontaneously, and voluntarily. If a boy wanted to write in school, he did so. Sometimes letters were devised at home. Now and again the help of a father or mother was enlisted, so that, as in the case of Sydney, previously outstandingly backward, home co-operated with school to good effect. Albert, the original instigator of these new activities, became possessed of a toy typewriter on which he tapped out, with much enthusiasm if little skill, many short notes, such as that which said

*I hope you are very glad tatt (=typing error!) that I am bringing smggg sume flowws (=flowers) Gudby from Albert.*

Or another which promised

*'Now I am going to try my best rinwrr in writing lessons and in sums lesson.*

Indeed, it is true to say that the personal touch implied in the receipt of 'the letter with the drowing pin in' made a profound impression upon Albert. He reverted to it on more

than one occasion, as, for example, in the note acknowledging the receipt of some blue paper which he wanted for some purpose of his own.

*Tank you for the blooe papr wat I have got and Tank you very much for 'The Forrst (=first) letter, gud By till next week*

That 'forrst' letter proved to be a turning-point, not only in the school life of Albert himself, but in that of the entire personnel of IIIb.

Hitherto school had represented to these children a reserved compartment in their lives, now they were surprised and delighted to find that, in the classroom, their out-of-school activities were looked upon with interest and a degree of sympathy. They quickly discovered how many things there were worthy of retailing to a curious reader, therefore they unconsciously put aside their reserve and wrote freely in response to the dictates of their inspiration. They soon perceived that writing could be fun, that it was no longer a boring business of full stops, commas, and intractable spellings. For the teacher, as soon as they were willing to write, it was not impossible to offer them guidance to improve the quality of their writing, for now, having an end in view, they could readily see the justification for the mechanics which had previously appeared to them as one of the inevitable evils of school work.

In the meantime, it was not long before the temporary pillar-box was replaced by the new model. We had secured a large piece of cardboard, and after discussion, the decision was taken to make a half-size model. Several enthusiasts had already brought to school drawings and pictures of pillar-boxes, while Keith had gone so far as to make a miniature model of his own. This unfortunately was found to be doorless, which gave rise to an argument as to the exact position of the indicator of the hours of collection, and resulted in a dash at 4.15 by Jeffrey, Harry, Sam, Neville, and George to the authentic pillar-box to ascertain the necessary facts. On the next day they began to measure up the cardboard, but soon found themselves stuck. I determined that they should deal with their difficulties alone, and I left them to argue things

out. The eager ones wanted to join the ends of the body of the box, but others pointed out that this should be postponed until the mouth and door had been attended to. They and some of the other boys remained in school at the end of the afternoon absorbed in a lively discussion concerning means and measurements, and learnt much about the divisions of a ruler, which the old method of teaching handwork had failed to make plain to them.

The difficulties were solved as the days passed and the pillar-box was gradually completed. Catastrophe threatened when the door was found to be scored on the wrong side of the cardboard and to open inwards instead of outwards, but disaster was averted by Richard, who suggested cutting off the door entirely and re-hanging it with a linen hinge. One boy's idea demonstrated the superiority of very long paper-fasteners over glue for joining the cardboard, while the clever method of devising and fixing the top of the pillar-box was evolved, in collaboration, by Richard and David. As Harry revealed the best of himself in, and derived the greatest satisfaction from his letters, Richard and David quickly made it plain that for them the best means of self-expression came through their hands. The command of logical argument which eluded them both when trying to write a composition, came easily to them when the problem to be solved presented itself in a practical form.

Soon, the necessity for stamps and envelopes suggested to Richard the possibility of establishing a shop, which the boys were left to organize in their own way. The fire-guard, hitherto an encumbrance in the small classroom which was heated by radiators, was hung round with dark paper by Sam and Frank, and a blackboard, placed across it, served as a counter. A large sign bearing the bold inscription, *POST OFFICE*, was pinned to the mantelpiece, but soon had to be taken down and replaced by another when the spelling error was remarked.

One boy decided to print a notice, 'This way to the Post Office', which he put up on the wall, others made stamps, and others envelopes—'prise 2d'. Kenneth displayed unexpected ingenuity and common sense in making his money-till,

and David's pen-rack was excellent in its simplicity and efficiency. Postal orders, £1 notes, telegrams and dog-licences (the last-mentioned introduced by Neville) all made their appearance, after authentic examples had been examined and their uses discussed. As postman, David was determined upon an official cap. He, and Donald, who had never before cared for handwork because his efforts had always resolved themselves into dirty, inaccurate failures, now created out of blue pastel-paper so successful an imitation of a postman's cap, that they were desirous of making another in a more permanent medium. It was wearing this one (made of cardboard, covered with dark blue cloth) that David, kneeling by the pillar-box, now completed and painted, posed for his photograph.

In all that the boys now did, they were encouraged to adopt two aims—to 'make it look real', that is to say, to base their work on accurate and intelligent observation, and to 'make a good job of it', in other words, to put the best efforts of which they were capable into all they undertook. And, in addition to the practice which these activities provided in English, Arithmetic, and Handwork, and in addition to the incidental Geography, and the general knowledge of everyday affairs happily acquired, much else of great value emerged. The class, as a body, was completely transformed. Absenteeism was reduced to a minimum, unpunctuality disappeared. The boys worked in pleasant co-operation with one another and with the teacher. As soon as they saw that, at school, they were encouraged to do the things they liked doing, their interests immediately became apparent and flowed into the classroom, their imaginations were freed, and their energies released. A boy perceived how *his* remark, or *his* suggestion could be the beginning of some vital class activity—and the effect was something very different from that produced on a child when, for example, he brings a picture connected with some school lesson to show to the teacher who does no more than to comment on it or to hang it on the wall. Instead of sitting back in indifference, the boys now had an embarrassing number of things they wished to do. Boys from other classes

began to be interested in them and to follow the progress of their activities 'Oh, miss,' said one of them, 'there was nothing like this when we were in Standard III'

Ronnie began to regret his promotion to IIIA. He would have been willing to sacrifice his prestige for the privilege of remaining to take part in the busy life of IIIB, and, after paying a visit to Blackpool, he could not refrain from taking up the pencil himself and sending the following letter through the classroom post.

*One Tuesday night I went to the cubs and I won a aeroplane it was called the Frog I went to Blackpool once and I went for a ride on the sands I went on a donkey As well as that I went on a dragon which took us round a thing which showed you all dwarfs One of the dwarfs was sitting at a table drinking ale an-other was standing at the counter eating a sandwich and then the dragon took us to the next one which was some dwarfs in bed and one had a clock near him Well thats all I can think of now so I will close my letter*

To receive envious notice was an unprecedented experience for the boys of IIIB and a new self-respect was born among them. A new confidence now animated their life in school and a fresh sense of enjoyment now enlivened the hours of each day which once had been, like the poet's life,

a weary interlude,  
Which doth short joys, long woes include

## CHAPTER III

### HISTORY

JEFFREY HAD been perusing a history book 'Please, miss,' said he, 'when did the Vikings come? Did they fight the Britons?'

The ears of the class pricked up immediately. As it was then almost time for the school to disperse, Jeffrey received only a brief answer to his question, but noticing how many of the boys had turned their attention from the various tasks in which they were engaged when the topic was raised, I offered to give them further information at a more convenient time if they were sufficiently interested in the subject. They declared that they were, and I suggested that, meanwhile, they themselves should try to discover something about the Britons and the Vikings from the class history books, which were easily accessible to them, and from any other available sources. On the following day we were inundated with a spate of pictures, books, and individual drawings, while the neighbouring Woolworth's store experienced an unwonted run on its stock of useful illustrated history books.

I pointed out that it would be much easier to remember and to follow the details and the sequence of events if they could be seen in their relationship in time to one another. Very soon, therefore, the boys were on the floor, engaged in making a large time-chart from sheets of pastel-paper of different colours, each sheet representing a century, and we were suddenly launched into the thrilling story of the conquests of these islands, of the struggle of the Britons against the invading Romans, and the Saxons, and of the long resistance of the Anglo-Saxons to the marauding Vikings. In a short while the time-chart grew gay with illustrations, and the boys' individual scrap-books, in which they entered their personal choice of pictures, and which they adorned with the drawings and colourings that pleased them, developed in interest, week by week. The collection of illustrations went

on apace, and pictures were exchanged with the same enthusiasm as attends the trading in foreign stamps of youthful philatelists. Thus, very quickly, by their own exertions, they acquired a fund of varied information. As they discussed their pictures with one another, they came up against problems which puzzled them and they asked questions which provided material for talks by the teacher who was enabled also to guide them to further research of their own. The boys themselves often entertained the class with short explanations of the pictures they had acquired and answered the questions asked about them, others would then be led to produce from their own collections pictures bearing on the same topic, and general discussion would develop in which it was the function of the boys to talk and of the teacher to listen until appealed to for the elucidation of some point or for some necessary information.

In addition to the time-chart and the scrap-books, there was other work for the hands, there were, for example, cardboard models of Ancient British chariots to be made, Roman villas and Anglo-Saxon huts, and there was no end to the subjects for drawing which the work inspired. Besides the usual medium of paper and pencil or crayon for this purpose, there were always several blackboards leaning against the classroom with the aim of enabling anybody who wished to make drawings in coloured chalks, and many and diverse were the impressions recorded there.

I had drawn an almost life-size picture of a Roman soldier to be used as an illustration during a talk. One of the boys suggested cutting it out and painting it, and four or five of them spent several of their playtimes in the act. The result was most effective, and 'Tullius' became an intimate friend of the class. He posed for innumerable copies, one of which, made by Roy, with its touch of blue in the skirt and its gilded armour, was almost a miniature work of art.

So, not by listening alone, but by making, by talking, and by discussing, by drawing, by reading, by collecting, and by observing, the boys contributed widely to their own learning. They were no longer spoon-fed, and their acquisition of

knowledge was real and lasting, for History was not now merely a tale told by the teacher, but a busy experience of the boys themselves, wherein facts fell naturally and significantly into place, and memory was assisted by all the activities of the hand, the eye, and the tongue, as well as of the ear. Nor were these children less quick than brighter boys to admire the heroic deeds of such figures as Boadicea, Caractacus, King Arthur, and King Alfred, and the quieter expression of the qualities of faith and devotion in the stories of Bede and Caedmon were not entirely lost on them.

At the time, plans for the City's Centenary Pageant were in progress. The older boys were taking part, and the boys of IIIb asked questions. It was explained how the city had received her charter a hundred years before and they were told how the children were helping to celebrate the festival. The boys of the school were to represent the 'Spirits of Steam', and, in discussion, the class was led to realize that steam was of comparatively modern use, and electricity more modern still. They began to perceive that the present life which they accepted as fixed and permanent, was in many respects different from that lived by children of the past, and they enjoyed speculating as to the ways in which it might be different in the future. They were fascinated with the idea that, although this pageant was inspired by an event of a century ago, the life of the city was, in fact, very much older than that, that a settlement of some kind had existed there since Roman days, and even before. This linked up with what had already been learned about the Britons and the Romans, and in their scrap-books they drew sketch-maps showing the supposed position of this settlement. Then Joe remarked upon the name of the city, 'It's like Chester, miss'. The attention of the class was drawn to the other forms of that element of the word, 'cester', 'Caster', 'Caer', and the significance of the name was explained. Atlases were thereupon distributed, and a hunt began for all the place-names indicating Roman origin on the map of England and Wales. These were afterwards marked in, and the Roman roads added, on a large wall-map which was the result of a joint effort by a number of the boys.



We proceeded to a consideration of the Anglo-Saxon settlement from which our city had grown. Harry immediately wanted to make a model village, but space in the classroom was so limited that this was impracticable. As a substitute we made an outsize wall-drawing on which, after a careful study of maps, and pictures, and especially of those found in the pamphlets issued in connexion with the centenary celebrations, the boys painted in the rivers, and drew the wooden church which it is believed stood on the site of the present cathedral. Huts were drawn in place, each one 'tenanted' by one of the boys. Every one chose an Anglo-Saxon name which he marked on his hut, and incidentally they were delighted suddenly to discover the origins of many of their own names. They soon found that they were not all derived from the Anglo-Saxon forms, and through a little interesting study of the history of names both of persons' and places, they were helped further to appreciate, by means of something personal to themselves, the reality of the invasions about which they had already been learning. Romans, Anglo-Saxons, and the rest, became individuals with names and personalities, while, when it was seen how in this one direction the various inhabitants of these islands had left their traces upon the life of the present day, it was not difficult to lead the class on to look for their influences in other more important directions. This was especially true, for example, when considering the Romans, whose contributions were in many respects so definite and material, and so obvious in their effects on the life of the people.

As the village developed, the essential features had to be noted—the necessity for building near to a stream, the track running through the centre of the village, each hut standing in its own enclosure, the village itself surrounded by a palisade and moat. The fields were planned out, and strips of land allocated to each boy. Trees, pigs, horses, cows, and sheep were cut out and fixed in their appropriate places. As the general life of the village was studied, different characters evolved. Sam became the village chief, and had to familiarize himself with the details appertaining to his position, details



A Viking Raid, drawn by Joe

of dress, and weapons, of the kind of hall he inhabited, and of the organization of his household. Other boys became fathers, others, sons, swineherds, millers, oxherds, and constables. The multifarious seasonal activities were studied, and dramatized. At ploughing time, the 'villagers' went to the oxherd to obtain the (improvised) plough and the oxen, and the strips were ploughed up and down the classroom with the accompanying whip-cracking and shouts to drive on the animals. When sowing-time came, the boys demonstrated the scattering of the seed in the Anglo-Saxon manner. The chief of the village held a banquet at which his minstrel was present and soon afterwards the class was thrilled by that great epic story told by a real minstrel of ancient times, the story of the noble Beowulf and his mighty deeds on the earth. On another occasion 'the village' was raided by the Vikings, after which Joe wrote as follows:

*I am an A-S warrior I have no wife The Vikings took her away Some day I may have a son. Some people think I am poor because I have no son The Vikings are very cruel, and if I lay my hands on one of them I will kill him They will not get my neckless (=necklace) Aethelbald is my best friend He is very kind to me I always fish for Aethelbald My soul is happy Aethelbald and his wife are Christians and we have a little chapel \**

Compare this with the first two letters he ever wrote. The first of these petered out incoherently.

*I hope I have been a good lad Albart as been a good boy I no Miss So I will keep him with then so good bye*

And the second read

*I hop I will a help to you instead of a indrrence While we are Making a post box, And I was intresting in Albeart wicels god save the king and I will be ending it now*

The reference here is to the occasion on which, during a music period, Albert volunteered a whistled rendering of the National Anthem, to the delight of the class and the near unmasking of the teacher, whose agonized amusement almost refused to remain under control.

'I have no doubt,' wrote John Ruskin, advocating for the teaching of History the usefulness of historical paintings as

a fundamental part of the decoration of schools, 'that as we grow gradually wiser we shall discover at last that the eye is a nobler organ than the ear you will find that the knowledge which a boy is supposed to receive from verbal description is only available to him so far as in any underhand way he gets a sight of the thing you are talking about' Even, though, perhaps, one may prefer to have one's illustrative material available in a form which allows of a more varied presentation than the mural paintings suggested by Ruskin, there are few teachers of to-day who will quarrel with the principle involved, that children normally learn and remember more easily through seeing than through listening How much more effective then should be the learning which makes an appeal to as many as possible of the faculties a boy possesses, and involves a variety of the activities he enjoys This was true of the work of the boys of IIIs, where the aim of the teaching was in Ruskin's words 'to *animate* their history for them, and to put the living aspect of past things before their eyes' Therefore, though they were often called upon to listen, it was more frequently to one of their own companions than to the teacher and it was very rarely that the talking was not inspired by something visual, and did not engender animated discussion and provoke thought The collecting of pictures, and their selection and arrangement in scrap-books, encouraged them to exercise their powers of discrimination, while their talks to the class helped them to gain poise and confidence There were many among them who would have shrunk from formal oral composition, yet who were able to conduct discussions on their illustrations with no little success for no other reason than that their attention was now focused not upon themselves, but upon their material, and while it was expected that boys of the calibre of Joe, Neville, Tommy, Keith, and others comparatively gifted in oral work, would revel in activity of such a kind, it was gratifying to observe the success of those less well endowed, like Stanley, Douglas, Roy, Kenneth, and Harry, and to see the eagerness of all, gifted or not, to take their place in front of the class The receptive capacity of the ear and the eye was further reinforced

by the co-operation of the hand in the constructing of models, and in the drawing of pictures either as sketches on the board to illustrate talks, as material for the drawing lesson, as contributions to the time-chart or the scrap-books, or even as the pleasant occupation of odd minutes with a piece of paper or on the floor before one of the spare blackboards, where it is impossible to say how many Tullius's succeeded one another from the hands of Roy and Kenneth, and how many incidents of Anglo-Saxon village life were depicted by Joe, Richard, David, and most of those who could lay their hands upon pieces of coloured chalk. As for the scrap-books, all of them were interesting and some quite delightful. Especially attractive was that belonging to Arthur, who combined in his book a judicious selection of pictures gathered from many sources, with excellent drawings, neatly executed and interestingly arranged. Where the making of models was concerned, the great favourites were the Ancient British chariots which owed their appeal to the curved knives attached to their wheels. Every boy in the class made a chariot, and many miniature battles were fought out on the table and on the desks, especially at the time when Queen Boadicea was the central figure of our studies.

But above and beyond even these activities, was the scope which the work allowed for the employment of the *whole boy himself* in dramatic play, for the exercise of the instinctive love of make-believe which forms part of the make-up of every boy. As an Anglo-Saxon villager, Jeffrey was not *learning about* Anglo-Saxon life—he *really was* a member of the village community, as the chief of the settlement, Sam identified himself completely with the man he impersonated. And what is a boy more likely to retain in his memory than a thing he has experienced himself? The pictures, the drawing, the modelling, simply ministered to the one end of giving him right impressions (in so far as it is possible to give to young children right impressions of distant events and scenes), so that these experiences of his imaginative life might bear the stamp of truth.

The considerable volume of written work which emerged

from these activities indicated how fully the play-instinct of these boys had made real for them the everyday life of the village and how closely the boys had identified themselves with the people they had supposed themselves to be.

Edward told a story of an accident in the village

*My father is an Anglo-Saxon farmer His name is Gerdic My name is Aethelnod I plough the fields every day. One day my father would not let me plough the fields because he wanted me to chop down trees There was another son (=boy) chopping down trees and a branch fell on him His father and another man carried him to his hut His father and his mother laid him down A few days after he died they buried him on the top of the hill His father and mother were weeping for a bit because they loved their son*

Neville described his life in some detail

*Our old Anglo-Saxon village is near a river If any fierce tribes come, our alarm goes, we get our weapons, and defend our children and mothers.*

*Often I go fishing, and I go chopping wood for our huts Sometimes I go to the bank to watch the clear blue silvery waves.*

*In spring we sow seeds in our cornfield*

*In our woods it is very dark and sometimes we have dinner and tea (there)*

*On Wednesday I go hunting for tigers (imagination a little riotous here!) and when I catch them I get the skins I lay them on the ground for a carpet*

*Always the men come (to me) for the oxen. We have a dog whose name is Grendel. He's very fierce*

In the past Neville's power of concentration had been described as very weak, but here he had found it sufficiently strong to sustain him through a prolonged effort, and to organize effectively the matter of his subject His power of expressing his ideas had improved since the time when he wrote his first letter

*the letter you sent Albert was very nice so I am sending you one In any case Albert read it out very nice but one thing he did not stumble and stutlar but a few words spoilt it*

Some of Jeffrey's letters have already been quoted, here is his description of his village life

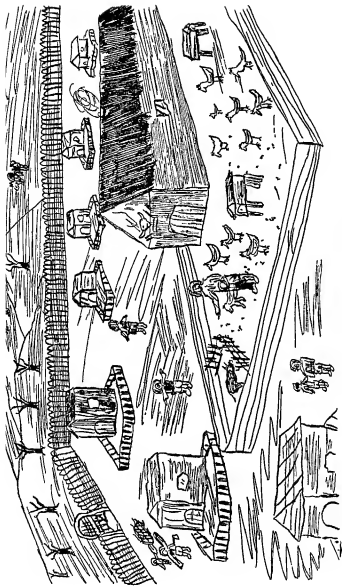
*My son Aethelnod was born in 888 A.D. and it was a happy day  
My son and I are satisfied with our hut We waste (=spend) our  
time by making weapons for any attack*

*Every night my son and I are invited to a friend name Aethelbald  
Every winter my son and I hunt the forest for wild animals Every  
morning in summer we go for a dip. My son and I are at the job  
of making a cart. (There is) a man called Osulf I help him with  
his strips When we had no meat my wife killed a pig. My son  
got bitten by a boar and it was a very bad wound*

All this work in History, like that based on the writing of letters, gave an enormous impetus to written composition simply because, by bringing the boys into personal relationship with their material, it freed their imaginations and gave them an incentive to convey their thoughts to paper. They wrote because they enjoyed it, and because they believed that some one else would enjoy reading what they had written.

They began to acquire a new outlook on 'History' itself, to realize that it was not a series of facts to be learnt, or even a selection of stories to be enjoyed, but a life which has been lived and is still being lived, and in which everybody, even each of them, has a part. They saw something of the changing of the world with the passing of the years, they could observe some of these changes, even in their own limited environment, as they watched the disappearance of the open spaces in their own district under the encroachment of new housing; they saw the evolution of a new style in house-designing based on new ideas, and a changing outlook. In the streets they saw macadam roads replacing the old-fashioned cobbles, while those who visited the centenary exhibition were able to compare the old types of fire-fighting equipment and of public conveyances with those they were accustomed to see on the busy main road near to their homes. All these ideas were concrete and practical and within the scope of the boys' understanding. Their observation and curiosity were sharpened, and their attention drawn to the life around them. The city in which they lived and of which they would one day be adult citizens took on an added interest in their minds.

Their handling of materials and sources showed them how



A Saxon Village drawn by Jeffrey



to find out information for themselves, and how to adapt it to their own needs. They were supplied, too, with a strong incentive to the exercise of their creative faculties through drawing, which, in turn, demonstrated the necessity for accuracy and keen observation.

Throughout this year they acquired a great store of varied knowledge and of broad ideas which it was in their power to appreciate, while, what was perhaps of most pregnant importance for them, everything they did was undertaken in a spirit of vivid enjoyment and vital enthusiasm.

These good results found ample demonstration when the time came round for oral examinations, when the head master himself was astonished by the eagerness and alertness of the class as a whole, and by the confident manner in which the boys gave full, clear answers to his questions and volunteered all kinds of relevant information of their own, offering illustrations and amplifying the remarks of others, with the aid of a newly enriched vocabulary which gave them the power to express their ideas with point and clarity.

Nor were these satisfactory achievements confined to a few. Jeffrey, the originator of the activities, distinguished himself, as was to be expected, for he had always displayed an interest in topics concerned with history, and Joe gave excellent proof of his mastery of his work, but it was the all-round high standard of attainment, and the generally pervading impression of informed confidence, which seized the attention of the onlooker, and which had their roots in an appeal to the imagination through practical activities, whereby the reality of experience was given to distant things and.

to any nothing  
A local habitation and a name

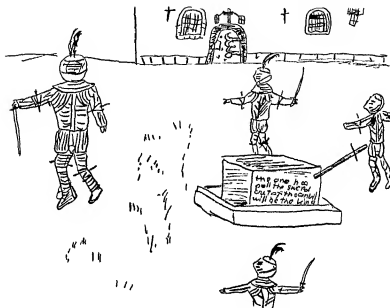
## CHAPTER IV

### THE PLAY

THE HISTORICAL investigations of the class had touched upon the exploits of King Arthur, and the boys had been listening with fascinated attention to the legend of how the young lad became King of all England and brought peace to a warring land. As the story concluded, Albert called out, 'Oh, miss, that would make a good play.' I concurred. Immediately a babel of voices offered a variety of suggestions. 'Miss,' said Richard, 'can I make a sword and paint it silver?' 'Oh, miss,' cried David, 'a boy in Standard III last year made a shield, didn't he?'

The table was promptly drawn forward and a set of attractive pictures of the legendary shields of the Arthurian Knights and the sword Excalibur was put on exhibition, together with a very decorative copy of the oath of loyalty and service which bound the Knights together in fellowship and unity. 'Could we draw them, miss?' asked Roy. Out came pencils and papers, and coloured crayon-pencils, the boys chose the shields they preferred and set to work. In this way they were introduced to the Arthurian characters through their individual shields, so that each became something more than a name. The boys quickly made known their desire to hear more of the Arthurian legends. Meanwhile we took out copies of the class history books, which contained a short account of King Arthur from the historical point of view, as well as more pictures which could be drawn and coloured. In response to Neville's question, 'When did Arthur live?', we consulted the time-chart now ornamenting the wall, and I gave details of the historical facts, telling them that Arthur was a Briton, who resisted the Saxons, but that little more was known of him as an historic personage. He must, however, have been a great hero, for, long after he was dead, people were still telling stories about him and inventing adventures for him and his Knights, until at last a man named Malory wrote them down.

Excitement ran high, and, on returning to school in the afternoon, armed with the promised illustrated copy of Malory, I was taken aback to find six boys already in the classroom, brandishing hastily improvised swords made in the dinner-hour, while Joe, Albert, and Richard carried King



The sword in the anvil, drawn by Jeffrey

Arthur story-books tucked under their arms. Richard declared that he had possessed his for three years, but had never tried to read it. Now he was anxious to do so.

In addition to the history books already mentioned, we borrowed from Standard II their copies of *Stories of Knights of Old* and *The Story of Sir Galahad*, which were distributed among the boys and kept handy for silent reading whenever they found a few moments to spare. There was nobody now who did not wish to improve his skill in reading.

I described to them my own visit to Tintagel castle, the legendary home of Arthur. They heard of the approach by the stony path, of the long climb up the steps cut in the rock, of the surging water far below, of all the gloomy, majestic scene rendered more impressive by the thick drizzle of fine rain, and of the romantic entrance to the castle by the gate which opened at the behest of a big key. Neville recorded his impressions of this account in one of his letters.

*When you was at Cornwall I hoped you liked it climbing up them steps nearly on the edge of the rocks where the water (was) lashing against the rocks. When you told us about it I enjoyed listening to it because it was interesting. In King Arthur castle that was interesting too.*

The atmosphere and background thus created, later found their echo in the opening scene of the play, where it was Neville, himself, as Merlin, who exerted a strong influence on that part of the dialogue. The boys were by this time in a fever of anxiety to begin.

Previous dramatic activity in the class, apart from the general dramatic attitude adopted in the work in history, had been only sporadic. The very first efforts had arisen spontaneously and accidentally through recitation. It had been my intention not to kill the enjoyment of poetry by insisting on its memorization, but I had read many poems to the class, and encouraged any boy wishful to do so to read or to recite to the others. The words of 'The Song of the Western Men' were becoming familiar from the singing-lessons when, one day, in reciting the poem, I involuntarily fell into the use of gesture. Quick as lightning, Keith declared that he knew two verses—could he say them and 'put in the actions'? How unerringly the boys always responded to the particular element in any activity which touched a vital instinct in their make-up. When the idea of a play was mooted, the mind leapt immediately to the magic words 'swords' and 'shields', in the case of the poem, the touchstone was dramatic action. In his recitation Keith showed a quite unexpected sense of the dramatic; the idea was seized by the class, and henceforth they had not to be encouraged to learn poetry, but demanded

it The results of this new attitude were remarkable, for the actions, with which they loved to accompany their recitation, involved attempts to bring out the full meaning of the poet's words, assisted memorization, and gave encouragement to telling and forceful speech, while confidence and a sense of mastery grew up when a boy found himself gripping the attention of the whole class by what appealed to him as the true interpretation of a poem Tommy, vital and energetic, with a strongly developed sense of the dramatic, was obviously bound to distinguish himself in such activity, but Keith, Richard, Joe, Douglas, Albert, Harry, James, Alan, and Teddy, revealed unsuspected ability Sam, who had always been shy, both by nature and from a consciousness of his backwardness, now took his place, while even George began to recite with some confidence and was glad to be asked to do so. Boys were frequently discovered copying out poems from school books in order to learn them at home, and they voluntarily memorized poems of their own choice to recite at school, not only to their own class, but even to their superior rivals, IIIA Poetry books assumed a new significance, and it was a common experience to see boys happily reading from them to one another There were references to poems in letters, such as that written by Eddie

*I have roat a poem to joy about boats. It is on the other side so I will close with love from Eddie.*

The other side of the paper was taken up by a carefully copied and charming little poem which had evidently appealed to his fancy

These activities had opened up possibilities, but as far as dramatic work proper was concerned, the problem was difficult. The common practice of reading and acting a ready-made play (by no means the most valuable part of dramatic work even for normal children) was of little use to boys like these, who were much hampered in reading by their lack of fluency and who always produced their best results from an activity motivated by themselves, not imposed from outside. Yet satisfactory spontaneous dramatization seemed an almost impossible ideal since the boys were usually at a loss for

words and ideas. Two minor ventures, however, had proved successful. I had invented a little game involving a Judge and a Jury, which we used as a means of practising the multiplication tables, and in which Teddy improvised well as the Judge. It stimulated enthusiasm for the previously repugnant tables, and formed the subject of numerous letters, among them, one from Charlie which said bluntly *I want to no when we are going to play corret*, and one from Edward, who, after a short absence, asked *Have we played court yet, iff not could we play it*.

The second attempt at dramatization had arisen when, after the boys had read the fable of the Cock and the Fox in a very simple version, Richard asked, 'Could we play it?' In the few minutes left before home-time, Sam, as the farmer's wife, Tommy as the cock, and Keith as the fox, gave a hurried and unimpressive performance which they asked to be allowed to repeat in the afternoon. Permission was granted, on condition that they assembled their ideas and set their stage. On arrival at school in the afternoon, I found them already there, and half-way through their preparations. With some ingenuity, Richard and Keith had converted Sam into the complete farmer's wife, by means of an apron of white tissue paper, and a red paper head-dress, while Richard had suggested the cock by a comb and woggles of the same red crêpe paper. The fire-guard and a couple of easels were now arranged to mark the farmyard, and a touch of realism added when a bowl was placed for water for the chickens and cocks. When the class was assembled, they gave their performance which proceeded without distinction until it flashed up in an unexpected and astonishing piece of acting by Sam, the farmer's wife. All that his part demanded of him was that he should pursue the fox as he fled with the cock in his mouth, but the assumption of agitation and indignation in his cry, 'Drop that cock! He belongs to me!' the menace in his running figure and shaking fist, and his gesture of despair as he turned away from a hopeless chase, drew a spontaneous burst of applause from his entire audience.

But the play of King Arthur, upon which we were now to

embark, was to be a much bigger undertaking. The boys wanted it to be long, and they wanted to act it for another class—preferably IIIA. It must be written down, and it must have a large cast. Before beginning, we re-read the story from one of the boys' own story-books, then from Malory himself, so that all the details were vividly in mind. A discussion followed concerning the title of the proposed play. Keith's suggestion of *The Sword in the Stone* was accepted until Alan, unusually meticulous, remarked that the weapon would be not in the stone, but in the anvil. Hence the name, *The Sword in the Anvil*, with an alternative, for the benefit of dissenters, *The Boy Who Became King*.

We proceeded next to a consideration of the broad lay-out of the scenes, and came up immediately against the problem of a beginning. Some wished to open with Arthur's discovery of the anvil in the churchyard, but Jeffrey and several others quickly perceived that the earlier part of the story could not be omitted. Others offered the alternative of commencing with the death of King Uther, but eventually it was decided that the most appropriate beginning was the point which led directly into the story, the accepting of the baby by the wizard, Merlin. The second scene suggested itself without much difficulty, with the object of revealing the attitude of the barons, and of informing the audience of Merlin's directions to the Archbishop of Canterbury. But the third scene gave rise to protracted argument. The problem was to take the barons into the church, to engineer the anvil on to the stage, and to bring the barons out again to discover it. But how was the anvil to be brought on reasonably and convincingly? It occurred to nobody that it was unnecessary to include the entry of the congregation into the cathedral (their exit would suffice) and the only method which they could at first devise of effecting the miracle of the appearance of the anvil was to draw a curtain while it was put into position, a solution generally regarded as unsatisfactory, especially in view of the strain a curtain would place upon classroom stage-management. Another suggestion that Merlin himself should be seen openly carrying the anvil and placing it in position, was

rejected on the grounds that such a proceeding did not conform to his character as a wizard. The whole problem had to be left in abeyance, and it was not until the other scenes had been planned out that this one was settled to the general satisfaction in the way shown in the finished play. A similar difficulty arose in connexion with Arthur himself. How were we to manage his travelling to the sports with Sir Kay and Sir Ector, his return to the lodging-house for his brother's sword, and his arrival in the churchyard to discover the miraculous anvil? Kenneth quickly saw the objection to too many scenes with Arthur as practically the only figure, and his idea of combining all this action into one scene was substantially accepted, though Jeffrey's conception of Arthur, discovered, after his fruitless return to the lodging-house, sitting on a milestone, and in conversation with an old man, after whose departure he has the idea of taking the sword from the churchyard, had its supporters.

In this way the broad outlines of the play were marked, and already the boys began to see how necessary to a satisfactory achievement was the application of the principles of selection and rejection, they had to weigh the pros and cons, to exercise their faculties of reasoning. They found this very difficult in abstract arithmetic, but were much more successful in a problem of this kind which interested them and appealed to their imagination.

Now the first scene was begun in detail, with a search for an effective opening. Obviously the postern-gate was the focal point, but which side of it was to be selected? If the audience were to be taken inside, the first characters to appear would be the Knights. If, on the other hand, the audience were to remain outside, it would be to Merlin himself that they would first be introduced. Jeffrey volunteered the idea of putting outside the gate a soldier sitting on a stone and drinking from a bottle—a comic figure startlingly reminiscent of the Porter in *Macbeth*, though Jeffrey was ignorant of the likeness. Still, no one seemed able to fix the opening to the general satisfaction. In order to ease the deadlock, I reminded them that they had chosen the point of dusk for the time of



the commencement of the action, and asked what kind of evening they conceived it to be. Edward suggested a cold, even snowy, and windy twilight, and suddenly imagined the lonely figure of Merlin in his beggar's disguise, plodding slowly towards the castle gate. Here seemed to be supplied the appropriate atmosphere of mystery and eeriness, a suitable setting for the character of a wizard. This was felt unanimously to be the solution for which we had been searching. Neville sprang up to give a demonstration of how he thought Merlin would proceed, using as a staff an old bamboo pole from a corner of the room. Jeffrey was critical. He thought that an *old* man would knock more slowly, and illustrated his idea—three knocks—pause—three more knocks—pause—three knocks again, and, after another pause, the slow drawing back of the postern-gate. Further discussion was unnecessary, every one was satisfied, and the outer side of the gate was chosen for the first scene. Thus was built up an opening of great simplicity and fitness, carefully calculated to grip the attention of the audience, with a good reason behind the decisions made, and a disposition on the part of the boys not to be content until they had found the best solution to the problems confronting them.

Several boys set up the easel to represent the postern gate, while two blackboards served for the walls on either side. Keith volunteered to take the part of the Knight who answered Merlin's knocking. A roar of laughter broke out as the wizard promptly and without making any conversation passed through the widespread legs of the easel and disappeared behind the blackboard, demonstrating vividly one of the limitations of play-writing which children usually find difficult to realize. However Merlin and the Knight quickly reappeared, and began their conversation at the gate, this time in view of the audience. It was very brief. 'Who are you?' 'I am a beggar.' 'What do you want?' 'I have come for the baby.' 'All right, I will tell the King.'

'Well,' I demanded of the class, 'what do you think of that?' 'Too short,' said Alan, 'the play would be over too soon.' The ensuing discussion on ways and means of extending the

dialogue brought forth John's opinion that the Knight would laugh at the thought of a beggar demanding the King's baby, and led to the idea of an argument between the two men, from which developed in time the conversation in its finished form.

The question of language arose. Frequent contact with Malory's style, and the notions embodied in the title, *Knights of Old*, of one of the school books, inspired Donald with the conviction that we should employ 'old-fashioned' language. 'You should say "thee", miss,' said he, and his notion was adopted. It cannot be denied that occasionally this decision led us into difficulties of expression, as when Jeffrey, as Merlin, threatened the reluctant Knight with, 'If thou dost not let me see him, thou master will be sorrow!', or as when Neville invited Merlin to sit and rest, adding sympathetically, 'Thou feet don't 'arf ache!' Again, when subject-matter was required for conversation between Merlin and the first Knight during the second Knight's absence in search of the King, it was decided to discuss the weather. Some exclamatory expression was required, suitable to the old-fashioned style. Tommy rose dramatically to the occasion. 'By goom,' cried he, 'it's cold to-night!' There was an instantaneous roar of laughter, the incongruity was obvious to all. 'Miss, that's nowadays!' cried Arthur. Tommy, nothing daunted, attempted to remedy his suggestion and declaimed with flashing eye and great gusto, 'By *ye* goom!' Total collapse of all. After calm had been restored the problem was solved, and the exclamation, 'By my halidom!' incorporated into the text at the instigation of the teacher. This direct intrusion of the teacher was a rare departure, resorted to only when the need was great.

The play continued to evolve. As each bit was conceived, acted out for trial, and completed, it was written down by the teacher, only to suffer numerous alterations during subsequent performances before reaching its final shape. Progress was at first slow, but exciting all the way. Everybody was free to demonstrate his ideas before the class, and to criticize those of others. Even if a boy were unable to imitate an idea himself, he could often see a way of improving that of some one else. Words and acting grew up simultaneously. Here

and there, the words of Malory himself, now very familiar to the boys, were received into the text. These included, in addition to the words of the inscription round the anvil, the last speech of Merlin in the second scene, the last but one speech of the Archbishop in Scene III, and parts of the conversation between Sir Kay, Sir Ector, and Arthur in Scene IV.

It was a matter of considerable satisfaction to a boy when the inspiration accepted as the right one was his, he had a stake in the venture, he had built a brick into the edifice. His ideas might sometimes be naively expressed, as in the case of the First Knight's 'This stone is not a very soft seat, but it's better than standing', or the second Knight's, 'Well, tell me your message, we might as well get it over as stand here arguing', but, for the boy who uttered them, they were his own creations which he cherished with tenacious pride. The command, 'Tell the King a vagabond awaits him,' came from Fred, who was so enthusiastic about his discovery of the word 'vagabond', that it was quite impossible to substitute another. It was Jim who was responsible for the query, 'Hullo! hullo! who goes there. Have we got a visitor?', and who, on one occasion, used it to provide a quite unexpected sensation. IIIs were amalgamated with Standard IIIs, during my temporary absence for an hour from the classroom. At that time the first scene of the play had begun to take on a fairly settled form, and the boys of IIIs were desirous of showing their companions what they could do. Jim, determined that nothing should be lacking as far as *he* was concerned, appeared from behind the blackboards on these words with such dramatic suddenness that the shock startled every one into uproarious laughter. From that time onwards we never failed to experience a certain amount of merriment at this point in our private performances, though, at subsequent 'public' presentations, the demeanour of all was beyond reproach.

Everybody sought eagerly for 'good' words and the play absorbed not a few happily chosen phrases and speeches, indicating a gradually expanding vocabulary and a growing appreciation of language. This reaching-out for vocabulary

was evident in such phrases as Harry's 'I come to seek the King', Jim's 'He's in one of his dark moods, I fear', George's 'What is all this commotion about a miracle?', or Fred's 'I may not reveal my name'. In the description of the rough, wintry evening, contained in the conversation of Merlin and the First Knight, and evolved mainly by Neville and Keith, there is to be found a touch even of the poetical, while the Archbishop's account in Scene II of the chaotic state of the country is workman-like and to the point. The boys learnt, too, to appreciate some of the problems of the playwright, and to gain some elementary notions of the stagecraft which contributes to a successful piece of dramatic art. They had, for example, in the first scene, to find natural and convincing means of getting over to the audience the information necessary to the understanding of the events which took place before the opening of the action, or, again, in the third scene, they had to make plain that King Uther was dead, and that fourteen years had passed since that event. Problems of language, of construction, and of stagecraft could not be solved without hard thinking and sustained effort, but enthusiasm never flagged.

As time passed, the boys made obvious strides in their power of spontaneous acting and speaking. Ideas began to flow, and, with the ideas, came a freeing of the power of expression. Timidity and self-consciousness vanished, because a boy smitten with an inspiration was too much under its influence to concentrate attention upon himself. He began to identify himself with the characters and to lose his own personality in that of the person he represented. In the beginning, much argument and discussion had been necessary, but as the characters began to develop and the plot to gather momentum, the fitting words began to come naturally and words and actions to weld themselves into an integrated form of expression. The speeches of Arthur in Scene IV were improvised on the spot. They are logically constructed and convey the necessary information—a considerable feat for Joe, whose written compositions had been accustomed to ramble in a maze of vague, incoherent verbosity. Again, in Scene III,

the episode of the fruitless attempts of the members of the crowd to draw the sword from the anvil developed spontaneously from the natural desire in every boy's mind to 'have a pull'—he had his 'pull', and spoke the words which for him naturally befitted the situation, while the other bystanders gave vent to their instinctive reactions. In addition to this new power over words and ideas, there began to grow up a new conception of the body as an expressive instrument. Hands were no longer merely for putting into pockets, and feet inconveniently for falling over. As the mind was freed, so was the body. One of the most convincing pieces of acting in the whole play took place round the anvil in the attitudes struck, without premeditation, by those attempting to dislodge the sword. Clumsy boots, and ill-fitting jackets could not entirely conceal the suggestion of beauty in the significant posing of youthful bodies, though the children themselves were not consciously aware of it, but even they could appreciate the power of their bodies to enforce the expression of their ideas when they saw it happening naturally and unaffectedly before their eyes.

Time after time, these boys revealed a surprising sense of the dramatic, and were not slow to understand the artistic value of balance and contrast. Keith was trying out the part of the First Knight, when Harry suggested that Jim should experiment with that of the Second Knight. Keith was tall and lanky, Jim, short and plump, and the contrast was intended to convey a suggestion of the comic. Again, the unheralded appearance of Merlin in the Archbishop's doorway was designed with the idea of springing a dramatic surprise on the audience. Still again, the method employed of drawing attention to the anvil, newly appeared in the churchyard, was well calculated to focus attention upon this unexpected phenomenon, while the close of the first scene is, in its own way, no less dramatic, as Merlin turns slowly away down the path, bearing the child in his arms, and watched by the King and Queen until he passes from sight, upon which the King gently places his arm about the Queen and leads her in, the Knights slowly fasten the gate, the scene is left empty, and

the audience in suspense. The apprehension of the dramatic and artistic value of balance and contrast found further expression in the deliberately calculated building-up of moods and atmosphere, and the juxtaposition of calmness and excitement, of lull and climax, of crowds and solitary figures. The play opens with the lonely figure of Merlin, and the general tenor of the first scene, slow, absorbing, suspended, ending on a dignified note, provides a contrast to the agitated atmosphere of the second. The third scene is bustling, excited, crowded, colourful, dramatic, followed by the quiet opening of Scene IV in which Arthur, the hero, though he appears so late, is introduced alone. This contrasting quiet atmosphere gradually works up to one of tense excitement, until Arthur himself, with a great flourish, plucks out the sword from the anvil, the crowd gasps, murmurs, sways, the Archbishop pronounces Arthur the rightful King of all England, and the curtain falls as the assembly raises a great cry of joy and loyalty.

The play had not been long in the making before there came the half-anticipated demand, 'Can we dress up for it?' The objection that they were boys, and that sewing would be required, was uncompromisingly swept aside. 'I can sew, miss,' said Sidney. 'So can I,' added Richard. 'I do embroidery for my mother.' 'And I,' declared Teddy, 'made a bib for our baby.' So we began.

'Beginning' involved, first, some very interesting researches, by teacher and boys, into the history of costume, after which the decision was taken to date the play in the mid-fourteenth century, when dress was attractive, but had not yet achieved the ridiculous elaboration which developed later. We aimed at using ingenuity, not money, in the production of the costumes. Blackboards, placed across the desks, served as tables, and the boys began to collect materials and to think out ideas. The crowns of the King and Queen, and the Archbishop's mitre were approached first. The crowns, copied from those shown on two of a once-popular series of cigarette cards illustrating the monarchs of England, were cut from stiff buff paper, painted with gilt paint, and adorned with 'jewels' of red. They and the mitre, also of buff paper, ornamented

with bands of red, and spotted with gold, were devised by the boys, who were hotly concerned as to whose should be the privilege of executing the decoration. The sword Excalibur, copied exactly from the traditional illustration from Tintagel, and made to scale, employed very thick cardboard, covered with shining tinfoil. The haft was painted with gold and beautified with 'jewels' in the same manner as the crowns. Sword-making sprang immediately into popularity. Many were wrought at home and put to good use in the playground until recognition of the potential danger of this practice brought it to an untimely end. Two of the best of these swords were appropriated by the first and second Knights. One was of wood, silvered over, with a shaped cross-piece nailed on and painted black, the other, made by Richard, and also of wood, was wound round with tough silver paper. The large coloured bead intended for a jewel, was ingeniously fixed by being threaded on a broken rubber band passed diagonally across the joint of haft and blade. These swords, and the two daggers made by Albert and Neville, were regarded as essential in all the acting-out of the play, and contributed much to the keenness of the boys for repetitive rehearsals.

Making swords was for them a thrilling business, but even more exciting was the costuming of the Knights. Foot armour consisted of pairs of old soft shoes (slippers, rubber shoes, or sandals) covered with strips of cardboard which were cut to shape and stitched to overlap each other to represent laminated armour. When painted silver they were extremely effective and realistic, but they had called for no small measure of *care, perseverance, and determination* in the making, for the job of stitching the strips was an awkward one, and involved many a pricked finger. The sensitiveness of the flesh was, however, no deterrent to the enthusiasm of the spirit, and Keith, Frank, Richard, Jim, and John eventually emerged triumphant out of their difficulties. Leg armour at first presented a poser, until Alan brought to school a roll of corrugated cardboard which David immediately suggested might be employed for this purpose, as it would bend easily round the leg without cracking. The suggestion was adopted,

the shapes for greaves and lower leg-pieces designed and cut out in the cardboard. The difficulty of fixing them remained. Jim stitched his to his long stockings, only to find that they tore as they were pulled on. But eventually a satisfactory solution was found. Holes were bored through the corners of the leg-piece after they had been strengthened with adhesive paper, and lengths of tape, knotted at one end, were threaded through, so as to tie at the back of the leg. Knee-pieces presented a further problem which was overcome by cutting out for each two identical shapes in black buckram, and stitching them together along the curved side, at each end of which was attached a piece of tape. The whole thing was then silvered, and when opened out, fitted comfortably over the knee. Each Knight now completed his leg-equipment with a pair of long black woollen stockings, the real property of a generous sister or friend.

Helmets required much skill. Trial shapes were made on the boys' heads, and the pattern thus evolved was cut out carefully in buckram, stitched up, and fitted with dish-cloths for the chain armour of the camail. The whole was then silvered.

Surcoats were simple as far as the pattern was concerned, but involved the problem of the allocation of the materials available—it was literally a case of cutting the surcoats according to the cloth. But in spite of this limitation, the aim was always to build up effective and fitting colour schemes. A piece of dismal old curtain material, of a dead brownish-fawn striped with a dull purple, was assigned to Merlin as suitable for a robe for a travel-stained wanderer and penniless beggar. His headgear, a liripipe cut out of white sheeting, was taken home and dyed brown by Edward. For all dresses, paper patterns were evolved and placed on the material by the boys, who then attacked the job of cutting out and stitching the pieces together. They soon learnt the value of thoroughness in this work, which was illustrated in a striking fashion when Merlin burst through his side-seams on the first occasion of the trying-on of his robe, and though needlework was not necessarily advocated as a boy's accomplishment, they gained,



nevertheless, some training in patient concentration on the job undertaken, and in seeing it through to a successful end Arthur learnt at the same time that in spite of its name, a thimble is worn on the finger, and not on the thumb! Keith and Jim, as the First and Second Knights, made their surcoats from pieces of shabby light-brown casement cloth which they thought suitable for representing war-stained garments. Keith added a plastron of blue material to bear his 'device'—two gold lions, copied from the shield of one of the Arthurian Knights. After sketching one of the lions on a piece of drawing paper, he cut it out and drew round the outline on to a piece of the sheeting remaining from Merlin's hood. When painted gold, the material stiffened, so that the task of stitching it in place was tedious and laborious, and therefore, for fixing the second lion he substituted the easier and quite as satisfactory method of gluing it into position. Jim was less ambitious, affecting nothing more than a deep band of yellow across his front. Richard's mother had made some cushion covers of a dark material patterned with rich shades of orange and red, exactly the right thing in his judgment to represent the richly woven fabrics favoured by some of the Knights of the time, while James, as Sir Kay, based his scheme of a white surcoat bearing a horn of green, on the picture of that Knight's shield.

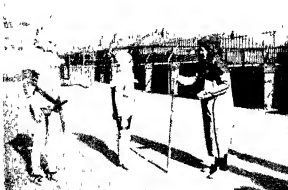
In the first scene, Merlin and the two Knights provided an opening which was sombre in colour, in keeping with the dark tones of the imagined setting. The boys gave it as their opinion that the King and Queen should provide a contrast in colours, first, because they were rich and important, and should have fine clothes, and, secondly, because the audience would grow tired of seeing only drab colours when new characters entered. Therefore, they decided to build up the 'King, Queen, and Baby' group in as pretty effects as possible. The only substantial amount of suitable material was some curtaining, by no means worn out, but temporarily laid aside in the writer's home, and now irrevocably sacrificed to the cause. It fell in heavy silk folds and moved with graceful effect with the movements of the wearer, but, though of a beautiful shade of lime green, it was not as gay as one could



Keith—First Knight



Teddy and Donald—  
Archbishop and Nobleman



Keith, Jim and Neville—  
First and Second Knights and Merlin



Joe—Prince Arthur



Tommy—the Little Boy



David at the Pillar Box  
(Kenneth in the background)

desire. The decision was therefore taken to use it for the King's robe, and to buy enough cheap red material for the dress of the Queen. Thus richness would be suggested in the texture of the King's gown, and in the colour of the Queen's. The 1s 6d spent on the scarlet material, and the 6d on some tinsel braid which made a bright, effective finish to the neck of the King's dress, represented the total expenditure on the costuming of the play. The boyish neck-bones of Roy, as the Queen, were observed to stand out rather too prominently until the neck-line was softened by a band of brown fur. The baby could have been represented by a doll, but a roll of cotton-wool, brought by Roy himself, as a temporary expedient, was found to be easier for a boy to handle, and more conveniently stored in our scanty cupboard space, so it was retained even in the final performance. When robed in a dress of white crêpe material, edged at the bottom with a band of the tinsel braid, and enveloped in a handsome square of gold brocaded silk, it suggested perfectly the royal baby, and completed a most effectively planned colour-scheme.

The costuming of the Archbishop was regarded by the boys as a masterpiece. It represented a triumph of effect combined with economy of effort. The frills were removed from an old-style night-dress of white lawn, which was worn by Teddy under a flowing cloak of the green silk curtain material, caught together across the chest with yellow curtain-cords finished off with gold tassels which had seen more humdrum days on a pair of cushions. Thus robed, and crowned with the mitre already described, Teddy suggested all the dignity of a great ecclesiastic.

Edward's mother had made a serious mistake in buying a large roll of cheap material which she intended for curtains, but which she now made up her mind was unsuitable for the purpose. Edward bore it in triumph to school. Its dark, wine-coloured ground, with embossed white stripings forming squares, suggested the rich weavings of our period. It was therefore chosen for the fashionable close-fitting surcoat of the noble lord who appears with the Archbishop in the second scene of the play. All the points which marked the up-to-date

nobleman of the time were observed—the long pendants, with scalloped edges, hanging from the sleeves above the elbows, the exaggerated lripipe, and the odd hose (represented by one black and one light-coloured stocking), and Donald, who rarely experienced the satisfaction of wearing clothes that were even clean or comfortable, now drew a pleasure almost pathetic from these faint reminiscences of the splendid garments of a bygone age.

The colour-scheme of the first scene had involved two small contrasting groups, one sombre and one bright, in the second scene the prevailing tone was quiet, the third scene was to be as varied and colourful as possible, because it was one of bustling activity, and because its characters represented all kinds of people. First, came the Knight already familiar from the beginning of the play, accompanied by Donald in his patterned surcoat, and by the Merchant, none other than George, in whom a miracle almost comparable to that of Merlin himself must have taken place, for it was a remarkable achievement that he should willingly speak even so small a part in a play and be prepared to do so before an audience. He wore a circular cloak of dark green, fastened on the shoulder with an ornamental buckle. All that was needed to complete the effect was a pair of long stockings for hose, and a bright green felt hat from Switzerland, which, with the long feather removed, suggested one style of head-gear in common use in the fourteenth century. The scene became increasingly colourful as the crowd assembled. The bottom of the surcoat of brown woollen material, and the cape-piece of the lripipe of Tommy, as the little boy, were of a pink shade not historically accurate, but the best that could be done out of the available materials. His legs were bare. Arthur, as his father, chose a cloak of Edward's wine-and-white stuff, and a lripipe of bright blue, and wore black hose. Albert was a young nobleman resplendent in a lripipe of bright red, and a surcoat and hose of yellow. Sam wore a red tunic, green stockings, and a green lripipe, while Alan was a less spectacular figure in a cloak similar to that of the Merchant, and a dull red cap made from the crown of an old felt

hat It was rolled up at the bottom in the manner of another common fashion Douglas's dark surcoat was relieved by a green lripipe and light stockings, and Edward's cloak of the wine-and-white material by a red lripipe, while the sixth man, in a green cloak and dark lripipe, combined with the Archbishop to complete the lively scene Several of the boys adopted Harry's method of imitating the popular hip-belts of jewelled squares of gold They used squares of gilded cardboard linked together with thick yellow silk

The last scene opened with the solitary figure of Arthur, the young prince. Having only just passed his fourteenth birthday, he was not yet a Knight, but Joe sustained that disappointment with fortitude He chose for himself a red surcoat, befitting his important station, a green silk lripipe, and a yellow hip-girdle, while his legs were clad in white hose Soon he was joined by James, as Sir Kay, in his armour and his white surcoat with its green horn, and later by John, as Sir Ector, whose surcoat of that most useful wine-and-white material was intended to march with his older years How we should have succeeded in costuming the play without the mistake of Edward's mother in the matter of her curtains, it is difficult to imagine

The climax of the play now approached, and the crowd assembled All its previous members appeared, and the Queen was disguised as an ordinary lady of noble rank, by the removal of her crown, and allowed to join in for the sake of the colour effect of her red dress Under these circumstances, the King was left off-stage, until, as a result of the general opinion that it was hard for him to miss participation in the enjoyment of the final applause, he too was deprived of his crown and included in the excited assembly

To the mind of the teacher, the convincing construction of that vital property, the anvil, appeared as a difficult problem, but it was in such situations as this that Richard and David were never at a loss They had carried through the tricky business of fixing a top to the pillar-box, and for them the anvil was an easy undertaking They took a large inverted cardboard box, to which shaped pieces of the same

medium were fixed with adhesive paper to form a 'nose' The whole was then painted silver and streaked with black below, creating the illusion of the curved sides The cleverness of the effect thus achieved by the simplest and most economical of means, drew appreciative comment from all who saw the finished anvil A slit was cut in the top, and the sword Excalibur, made to scale from the illustration from Tintagel, was inserted in readiness for its withdrawal by Prince Arthur

The anvil excited the imagination of Jeffrey who, writing at the time when this piece of stage-furniture was still in its unpainted condition, and when the controversy as to how it was to be brought on to the scene at the appropriate moment was at its hottest, plunged into his subject with his usual exuberance

*Richard can paint the anvil to make it look like an anvil and then me and Keney paint the golden letters on and then put the sword in it it will be a grand sight but the worst thing about it is how are you going to put it on the stage*

He found it difficult to restrain his impatience, and followed this letter up on the next day with another which said

*The play will be a grand play please when will me and KI rise the words on the anvil*

Early discussions concerning the problem of how the anvil was to be constructed were reflected in Edward's note.

*are we playing King Arthure and his knights, if so what are we having for the anvil and who is going to be King Arthur*

The play was almost completed when, about a fortnight before the end of the Summer Term, came the day, awaited with eager anticipation by the boys, on which the school was thrown open to parents. Many were their expressions of satisfaction at the change of attitude towards school life which they had observed in their offspring, and at the unmistakable progress in school-work which had been made in the twelve months now drawing to a conclusion They listened with smiles of pride to recitations—with actions, of course!—and to songs sung with obvious enjoyment, and examined the books of written work which were now produced for their

inspection without hesitation, and not, as in former times, with apprehension, by their owners. Finally, the boys demanded that they should perform the play. Dresses were therefore quickly donned, desks were moved to make as much space as the small room would allow, and after the preliminary announcement had made it clear that the play was really not yet quite ready for public performance, the masterpiece was presented to a cramped audience of mothers and of baby brothers and sisters, a gathering in which the adult members began watching in a spirit of toleration and ended by being impressed.

A few days afterwards, invitations were written asking the head master to attend a finished and polished performance. Jim wrote

*I hope that you are coming to see the play. It is very nice indeed. The harch Bishop speaks up very well. On mothers day the mothers were all clapping. The name of the play was King Arthur and his Knight.*

Harry's invitation ran

*Will you come to see our play. It is interesting and you will like it very much. The play is named the Sword in the Anvil, there are fore seems in the play and we have made the dresses ourselves.*

And the message from Tommy said

*The boys are getting anxious to do the play for you. The play is the one we made up and we are doing our best to get all the dresses by the time you come. The play is about King Arthur.*

Even George, far from shrinking from the ordeal, as would at one time have been inevitable, was now perfectly willing to act his part even in the presence of the Head, and wrote

*Will you come to see are play. We have made it up. It is intresting and you will like it. It is about King Arthur. If you come to see it the class will be pleased.*

Thus beguiled, the Head could hardly refrain from acceding to the requests, and the play saw its second presentation. The gratification of the class knew no bounds when they were told that their efforts were good enough to be worthy of showing before the whole of the Junior School on the last morning of the term. This was felt by all to be a signal honour,



for ambition had never set itself a goal higher than that of a performance for the benefit of Standard IIIA

The interest of this new audience was never in doubt from beginning to end. They listened and watched with absorbed attention, and the burst of applause which greeted the final words was a spontaneous and sincere witness to their enjoyment. But still more worthy of remark were the happy smiles of the excited actors themselves, as they stood bowing before their appreciative audience. It was very pleasant to see this transformation, and to observe how, in twelve short months,

our crow turns swan,  
Or how a silver snow  
Springs there where jet did grow

Those bright faces repaid all the efforts of a strenuous year.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMING UP

AS THE imaginary curtain fell upon the final deeds of Prince Arthur and his companions, it descended also upon the concluding activity of the life of Standard IIIb. It was time now to assess the worth of the work done during the year just drawn to a close.

Indisputably, there emerged one factor of the greatest value. If nothing more had been achieved than that change of heart to which every act, every word, and every cheery face of these boys bore constant witness, the work of the year would have been largely justified. This new attitude to school life and school-work was the fundamental preliminary to any progress whatsoever. The horse can be brought to the water but cannot be forced to drink, nor will the dull boy be coerced, or even persuaded, into effective learning, unless a means can be found of creating in him an active desire for it in some form or other. For in boys like those of IIIb, there is much else to be combated than mere dullness of intellect. Even more fatal than that is the accumulation of all those deadening influences which tend to stagnate still further the slow-moving, erratically flowing streams of mental activity—the lethargy, the indifference, the positive aversion which arise from compulsory preoccupation with uncongenial tasks, the discouragement and the breakdown of confidence which come from constant failure, erecting insurmountable barriers to progress and blunting the sharp edge of understanding.

The new spirit of lively enthusiasm and healthy enjoyment had rapidly permeated every aspect of the life of the classroom. A breath had breathed upon the valley and the dry bones had assumed a sudden, unexpected vitality. Boys who were not members of the class would now have been glad of the opportunity to come in, and those who belonged to it were reluctant to leave. Lawrence and Cyril, not mentioned hitherto because they were mere buds of passage who joined

us for a few weeks in the second term of the year before being admitted to a school for delicate children, paid unsolicited tributes in the letters which they wrote during their short stay

*I hope [said Lawrence] you are getting on alright, and I am also going to be very good and going to get on with my spellings and with my sums, I am glad I came to — School I have beter go now it is nealy tea time so good dy*

And in a second letter he declared again *I am glad I came to this school, I like it very much*

As for Cyril, he obviously regretted his departure. One of his notes began by saying *I am very sorry that I am leaving this school on Monday*, while another, echoing the same sentiment, ran:

*I am very sorry I am leaving the school. I will wish you good luck when I go I will be going in a moter I will be stopping for dinner and coming home in a moter van Good luck for when I go*

Very practical effects of the changed attitude of the boys were manifest, for example, in an astonishing decline in unpunctuality. No boy was now late for school through his own fault. He usually had some scheme on hand in the classroom, or some interest in the affairs of some one else, which was sufficiently important to give school the first claim upon his attention. Similarly, ill-health received an apparently inexplicable check, the truth being that slight headaches and minor indispositions were no longer magnified into plausible excuses for unofficial holidays. Classroom behaviour underwent a marked change. The breaking down of that impenetrable wall of indifference was accompanied by the disappearance of the inattention which had previously been the source of so much irritation to the teacher and of so many punishments for the boys. Now the children were willing to pay attention to an interested participator in their activities whose words could usually be relied upon to have some bearing on their own projects, while their work, whether written or oral, was attacked cheerfully and courageously, and difficulties were approached in a determined spirit. Everybody discovered something which he could tackle with success, and even if, for some, the way of intellectual progress was still not

a primrose path, the track was at least no longer completely obliterated by thorns. The innumerable objectionable little habits which so often mark the behaviour of school-weary boys were unconsciously dropped. Cheating, for example, no longer served any purpose. Surreptitious talking, playing with the nearest thing to hand, lolling about the desks, sticking pen-nibs into nearby boys or jerking them to noisy protest by a vicious pinch, to say nothing of downright disobedience, no longer marred the progress of lessons. In fact, the question of discipline hardly arose. The nature of the work demanded freedom to move about the classroom if necessary, and to talk if the business in progress called for discussion, but the boys were easily trained to respond with their full attention at a word from the teacher, and the very fact that the accustomed ban on these natural vehicles of expression was raised, removed the old incentive to rebellion against the eternal, detested 'Don't'. Events proved that a child seriously absorbed in an interesting occupation tends to be silent rather than noisy, and the boys were more keen to pursue their tasks than to waste their time in idle chatter. If proof were required of this improvement in discipline it would be unnecessary to look further than at the truly amazing reformation in the behaviour of that most stubbornly difficult character, Henry. He still continued somewhat erratic in attendance, though much less so than before, and only for unavoidable reasons, but his obstructionist tactics ceased in the face of the new strategy, and his desire to be a nuisance deserted him. He certainly never gave any trouble in the classroom, and, not once during the whole of his sojourn in IIB was he involved in disgrace in the school. With a little judicious encouragement, he even settled down to work, so that, by the end of the year, he could write a short, coherent composition and could read a Standard II Reader, a not inconsiderable feat since he had begun by being incapable of attempting composition, of reading more than the commonest words of three or four letters, or even of identifying accurately all the letters of the alphabet.

With this new outlook, the way was cleared for advance. If the boys were capable of learning, they had now removed

the main obstacle to some degree of progress. What degree of improvement did they, in actual fact, achieve? What did they and their school-work gain or lose as a result of the experiments of the year? First, consider the field of the 'three R's', which had constituted so great an obstacle in the past, and upon which tradition and custom had placed so great a value.

In arithmetic, a subject of great difficulty for most dull children, the old way of teaching had resolved itself into an effort to master the mechanical processes of the four rules of number by daily grind, while these processes as applied to pounds, shillings, and pence, loomed ahead, threateningly, on a distant horizon. It had seemed impossible to instil into these boys the powers of logical thinking necessary for the solution of problems, for it is in exactly that intellectual faculty that dull children are deficient, therefore all attempt to make of arithmetic anything more than a mechanical drill had been abandoned, and, for the boys, it had become a meaningless drudgery, bearing no relation whatsoever to their own everyday lives. Yet it should not have been so. The majority of these youngsters, who could not calculate the simplest money sum, in school, were capable of being entrusted with the family shopping, but the sum in the classroom and the goods in the grocer's shop had never been brought into a sufficiently vivid and concrete relationship to allow them to see the bearing of the one upon the other. When concerned with potatoes or postage stamps they experienced no difficulty, but abstract figures baffled them—they symbolized nothing, they represented nothing real. But by the activities of the post office, this gulf was bridged. A twopenny envelope, paid for with two pennies, if only of cardboard, was more significant than a figure two in the pence column, while all the transactions carried out were such as might take place in 'real life'. Moreover, a boy quickly saw that when he wrote down a record of any of his transactions, he was making his own sum, which, in fact, was very similar to those whose intricacies had previously been beyond him, and when he was presented by his teacher with further examples of the same kind he approached them

with the conviction that he understood what he was doing. A pair of scales, made by Donald and Kenneth, formed part of the post office equipment, so that practice in weights was not neglected, while the measuring and calculating involved in the constructing of the pillar-box and in the designing of dresses, swords, and helmets provided many practical exercises to overcome the difficulties of yards, feet, and inches. The results of their activities were plainly evident, by the end of the year, in the enormously increased confidence with which the boys responded in oral work in arithmetic, no less than in the generally improved standard attained in written work. No attempt was made to force everybody up to the same stage of attainment, each boy was allowed to move at his own pace, and encouraged to make that pace as rapid as possible conformable with his ability, but in the final school examinations of the year, in order to check up on general progress, all were required to attempt the same paper of five mechanical sums involving the four rules in thousands, hundreds, tens, and units, yards, feet, and inches, and pounds, shillings, and pence. Only Richard had the misfortune to score no marks at all, and Stanley, Dennis, and Jim to have only one sum correct, although both Stanley and Jim failed through inaccuracy, not through inability to understand the method, while Dennis's one sum represented a minor triumph, it being the first of his ever to be correct in any school examination. Of the rest of the class, Tommy and John, as would be expected, since they were the two with ability, gained full marks; so, also, did Jack, as well as Henry and Harry, while eight others were correct in four sums, and seven others, including Sam and Alan, in three. The remainder, each with two examples correct, included David and Douglas, who had shown improvement in spite of their natural tendency to lack of concentration in arithmetic, and Sidney and Raymond, who had made good strides towards making up the leeway in their standards caused by so much absenteeism in previous years. These results indicated a very obvious degree of improvement on the achievements of the past in the mere mechanical arithmetic, for which, under the old method, all

other exercise in the subject had been abandoned, while an examination of the incorrect sums revealed that all had mastered the methods of working and required only time in which to gain the additional accuracy of calculation. But the total achievements of the year went considerably beyond this, in the new confidence which marked the attitude of the class to their work, and in the greater understanding which they brought to bear on it, enabling them to tackle not only straightforward written examples but also simple problems such as they would meet with in everyday life. Arithmetic had been made 'real' for them; it was no longer merely an isolated school subject. This relating of the work to life was of the utmost importance, for, in the years that lay ahead, it was unlikely that boys of this type would be called upon to make excursions into the realms of complicated mathematics, but they would certainly need to be able to do such practical things as counting and handling the week's wages, coping with the shopkeeping bills and all the household expenditure, and understanding and applying to everyday affairs the system of weights and measures. They would need above all that sense which is 'common' rather than arithmetical, the ability to use money wisely, which can come only from actual experience, combined with a sense of values to be gained more from character-training and from the inculcation of wholesome ideas of pleasure, and of the right use of leisure, than from the mere practice of pen-and-paper arithmetic.

The solid progress of the boys in arithmetic was amply demonstrated; what of their achievements in the written language? The difficulties of written composition have already been noticed. With its complicated combination of skills and abilities, it presupposes a mind alive with ideas, and the ability to arrange them in logical sequence, together with a command of language sufficient to give clear and convincing expression to them. The art of handwriting must have been sufficiently mastered, punctuation requires due attention, and spelling is not one of the smallest stumbling-blocks. None of these requirements is easy to fulfil by itself, how much more difficult in combination—especially when one's teacher is apt

to be dissatisfied unless the handwriting is very neat and well-formed, the full-stops carefully observed, the spelling almost faultless, and the expression clear and concise. It is not remarkable that dull children are reluctant to undertake so formidable a task. Yet, without elevating written work to a disproportionately high level of importance, a certain degree of efficiency in written English is necessary even for them. When they grow up, they will certainly need to be able to communicate in writing with the people whose lives and affairs impinge upon their own, whether it be in letters to relations, official or business communications, or notes to school to explain the reason for Johnny's absence. In any case, whatever they write will be penned with a definite purpose in mind, and this seems to indicate the starting-point for any written work in school. If the boy has something definite to say or some clearly defined object in writing, the first obstacle is removed, if he has in his mind a vivid impression of his subject, it is likely that he will be able to proceed to the expression of ideas with a natural freedom, especially if, at first, he is allowed to do so without being over-hammelled with mechanical restrictions, which can be imposed gradually as time goes on, and as the boy himself begins to appreciate the need of them in order to make his work more perfect. It is now accepted by all sensible teachers as a bad principle, to set children to write without making sure that they have some ideas about the subject given, but there is still a fundamental difference between imposing a subject upon them, and accepting a subject of their choice which arises from their own experience. In the first, the ideas may come at second hand, in the second, the boys begin to be aware of the ideas already in their own minds but hitherto unrealized, as though a spring released in the brain sets it in motion, as the creative faculty is stirred to activity. Herein lay the value of the letter-writing which gave a boy freedom to put pen to paper whenever he chose and to write on any subject which appealed to him, while the long-continued play of the post office sustained interest by creating a constant incentive to more writing. Thus it was possible to wait for a boy's mind to open



out and to watch him gradually extending his field of topics. Jim's letters, for example, were at first conspicuously monotonous and were of a cumulative character, each adding a little to the previous one. His first effort read *I hope you are very happy, when you go out at week-end*. This was followed shortly by a second missive *I hope you are very happy And I hope I get my spelling rate this afternoon and next friday thats all*.

The third showed little variation

*I hope you are very happy when you go out at week-end and I hope I get my spellings right and my Tables right*

But the next began to be more communicative. It opened with the same formula:

*I hope you are very happy, then continued, I go to the pictures every week and i've not got no mother and father but ive got free sisters I do like you very much*

In the next he broke entirely new ground

*I am going to my pals house on Saturday And I am sleeping an all at is house and Ill get a bus and I be very happy to I think that will be all*

This was followed by an account of the pal's return visit, a concrete experience on which he could grow still more expansive.

*My pal came down our way on satday and he slept with me and my brother and he did enjoy himself he played on my bike he had dinner with me and my brother and I used to play with him down Lind street I think that will be all*

Thus, gradually, Jim began to be aware of the interesting material provided by his own daily life and to enjoy recording it for the entertainment of a reader. His brain no longer became a blank when written work was called for, his thoughts became freed and his pen found occupation. If at first his spelling was unsteady and his punctuation negligible, these were faults that time and patient instruction could remedy, but until he had found the confidence or the inspiration to make an attempt at writing, however faultily, it was of little practical use to concentrate too much attention upon the arrangement of letters in a word or the position of a comma or a full stop.

This new-born desire to write, and this free supply of material, thus initiated a vast impetus to the actual practice of writing, with an inevitable raising of the general quality of the work produced. It is impossible not to remark the improvement revealed by an examination of the first and the last-quoted letters of Harry to be found in the second chapter of this book. Every one of his letters was entirely his own. It owed nothing to help from home or to suggestion from school. Clearly, then, a boy with the power of enjoyment and the appreciation of small details characterizing all which Harry wrote, and a boy who could show so much advance in less than twelve months, need never be at a disadvantage in the workaday world of his adult years if only that interest and that progress could be maintained in the time remaining to him before the door of the classroom closed upon him at his final exit.

Joe was a much less prolific writer than Harry, and his work had originally been marked by extreme brevity and a decided tendency towards incoherence, yet before the end of the year, he was able to produce the composition quoted in Chapter III, concerning the life of an Anglo-Saxon villager, and to describe his dog, Bullger, in the following terms:

*Our Bullger is a very good dog. It knows when it is having the strap. It shakes hands and runs after balls, and it nearly asks for a drink of water, for it is a funny dog. It nearly always follows me to school. When my dad comes home and if anyone comes near the house it always barks.*

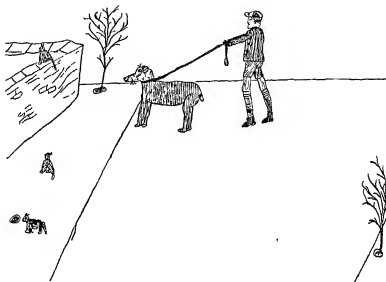
Sam, it will be remembered, had officially been certified on the brink of mental deficiency, and his knowledge of reading when he entered III<sup>B</sup>, had not extended even as far as the ability to recognize accurately the letters of the alphabet. Yet he, too, tried his hand at letter-writing, and, by the middle of the second term, he was expressing his optimistic hopes as follows:

*I hope I am the top of the class next year. I hope Jim is next. I hope that all the class can read as (well as) Tom.*

Roy had always been most reluctant to take up the pen, for he had found it so arduous a task to produce one or, at

most, two, dull laborious sentences, which represented the utmost of his output during the time usually allotted to written composition. But, no sooner had the class embarked upon the voluntary composing of letters, than he, too, joined

*Rac the dog.*



Rac the dog, drawn by Roy

enthusiastically in the game, writing, not only from school, but also from home. His letters were often accompanied by illustrations, especially of his favourite subject, Rac, the dog. The first of his letters was written on a page taken from a diminutive note-book—hence the nature of its contents.

*Can I send letters with this sort of paper if so will you if you wish will you send a letter saying yes are no*

By the time Christmas had passed he had achieved a more satisfactory power of expression.

*I have not told you what I got for Christmas so I'll tell you now I got a Zoloo shooting game and a flash-lamp I did have a box of sweets*

The pleasure he experienced at being entrusted with the part of the Queen in the class play was expressed more than once, as, for example, in the following letter, which, though characteristically short, left little to be desired in the matter of spelling, punctuation, and expression

*I hope I can get on with the play And I will do my best in my part You know I am the Queen I myself may be able to make some cloths*, while his composition called 'Rac the dog' was an improvement on his earlier letters on the same subject

*Rac shakes hands with you if you ask nicely And if you have anything in your pocket it gets it out and tries to eat it, Rac goes round in a circle if you have anything in your hand*

These examples, quoted from the work of boys of varying mentalities, are typical of the general upward trend of the standard of the written work during the year. Some advanced more rapidly than others. Some, like Alan, always of an unstable temperament, were more erratic in their progress, but all drew enjoyment from their writing, whether it took the shape of letters or of the more formal composition, and every one gave evidence of a greatly improved command not only over his material and its arrangement and expression, but also over the mechanical aspects of the work represented by punctuation and spelling

For dull children there is probably no easy road to success in this matter of spelling. The inability may arise from diverse deficiencies and make itself apparent in various guises, while the ability to spell is not very closely correlated with ability in other subjects. However, words are things to be used, and skill in spelling them does not become necessary until they have to be written down. Thus when the boys of IIIa began to concern themselves with written symbols they quickly became aware of the importance of being able to spell. They began to concentrate some attention upon words and their forms. They found the same words occurring frequently in their writing, and by this constant exercise of their visual and their 'motor' memories, these common words gradually

became impressed upon their minds, while by examining their letters, it was possible to find an indication of the type of words they needed most, and so to help them to learn to spell a practically useful vocabulary. In making notices, labels, and properties for the post office, they were obliged to give consideration to spelling, and two small typical examples have been noted in a previous chapter of the way in which the boys, encouraged to be on the watch for errors, were not slow to correct David's mis-spelling of the word 'Letters' and Sam's version of 'Office'. Their studies in history led not only to a considerable amount of writing, but also to a vast increase in reading, involving a new familiarity with an enlarged vocabulary of frequently recurring words. In these ways, by constant repetition in use, by the steady employment of the visual memory through the eye, and the motor memory through the hand, and by a freshly awakened interest in words which helped to fix on them more than a fleeting attention, the boys began to succeed in spelling a vocabulary adequate to their needs. This was supplemented by the weekly short list of common words which each class in the school was required to learn for an oral test given by the head master each Friday afternoon. After a time, the boys of IIIb actually had the satisfaction of winning in this competition with those of the rival classes—a sign not only of their earnest endeavours to master the words during the week, but also of the increased confidence with which they now sustained what had once been a dispiriting ordeal for teacher no less than class. This weekly contest was frequently referred to in letters like that of Frank (the delinquent) who wrote, a little anxiously:

*I hope we will win with the spellings this week because I like the class to win. I always let the class down but I will try to not get out this time.*

On the occasion of IIIb's victory twice in succession, James was looking forward to the third contest.

*I hope I am the top of the glass (=class) next year. I hope we win in spelling this week, because we like to win three times on the run. I will try not to let the class down on Friday.*

His efforts were rewarded, and the 'hat-trick' was performed

But, of the 'Three R's' it is certainly Reading which is of the greatest significance for dull children. This skill is one of the main lines of communication between the individual and the world around him. His daily newspaper keeps him informed of how the world is faring, official forms regulate increasingly the society in which he lives, notices guide him here and direct him there, and posters and advertisements suggest to him how to spend his money. Books pour from the press, many of them of a practical kind for which even men and women without an intellectual bias may find a use, while it must not be forgotten that a small degree of mental inferiority does not exclude the development at some future time, and perhaps through some accidental contact or some unexpected experience, of a new and satisfying interest in which the ability to read will play a contributory part. The girl, for instance, who can sense the beauty and expressive power inherent in the movements of the superb ballerina may not of necessity be gifted with outstanding capacity of a purely intellectual nature, but may feel a strong desire to know more of the dancer's life and art and must almost certainly turn to books for some of her information, while the love of a good story is not wholly confined to those people with an Intelligence Quotient of one hundred or more. Thus for all reasons the expenditure of energy upon acquiring skill in reading is well worth the effort, especially as it is a subject which can be mastered by children of comparatively low intelligence.

In IIIb it was amazing how much the boys taught themselves in this subject when once the desire to read had been aroused. The receipt of a letter necessitated the ability to read it, and demonstrated in a practical way the usefulness of this skill. Richard's story-book had lain neglected for three years until a strong incentive to learn its contents was supplied by the awakening of interest in the adventures of King Arthur. Similarly the wish to read spread like an invigorating breeze over the whole class in their anxiety to gain information in connexion with their historical activities, or in their search for

poems for the entertainment of their companions. There was now a concrete aim, a practical reason for concentrating attention upon words. Reading was no longer merely a monotonous and difficult exercise, it had become an indispensable necessity—a boy began to understand that he was missing something by his inability to do it, and was accordingly anxious to repair the loss. As a result of their activities, the children made progress unconsciously, without pausing to consider that they were learning to read, and where it was a question of practice being the first need, the progress made was remarkably rapid and effective. Moreover, the Mountain now approached Mahomet—the boys came of their own volition, asking to be taught, and were prepared to undertake the very drudgery which they had previously rejected. The old system of group-reading found a reinvigorated usefulness, but animated by an entirely new spirit, and deprived of its deadening formality, for the class was no longer divided into rigid sections, two or three of which were left to read silently, though probably not conscientiously, from prescribed books, while the third or fourth stumbled through another under the eye of a bored teacher. Henceforth, a variety of books was always easily accessible to those boys who wanted them, and there was never any lack of interesting activity of other kinds, so that it was quite easy to gather together a little group of those who were at a similar stage in their reading, and to work with them while the remainder of the class was busily engaged in a variety of individual or group activities. It was also possible to devote special time to individual teaching with those who most required it. In this way, Sam, hitherto consistently, though reluctantly, neglected, was led gently from abysmal ignorance of his letters to a point at which he could cope with tolerable success with a book of the standard prescribed for Standard II. Having arrived at that stage, he could look forward with hope to future endeavours and achievements. His past failures had engendered in him a rooted conviction of the excessive difficulty of reading and had completely destroyed the self-confidence of a boy already, by nature, very shy. In the attempt to help him, it was clearly

not enough to present him with a scheme of work, however well planned—something human and sympathetic, some feeling of personal co-operation between his teacher and himself, were what he required, to convince him that he could learn to read, and that it was not impossible to find enjoyment in the process. It was here that his own quiet sense of humour was invaluable. He learnt to laugh at his own mistakes, to chuckle over his almost unconquerable difficulties with the letter x (which for him was always 'sk' or 'sks') and to enliven his learning with a little chat and a pleasant joke. He mastered the alphabet, began to read simple matter, and felt himself getting on. Meanwhile, since a 'duffer' is usually apt to find his shortcomings an object of derision to his companions, it was desirable to enlist the sympathy of the class on his side. Therefore it was made clear to them that Sam owed his backwardness in reading to the misfortunes of his ill-health and absence from school, but that he was working hard and would, no doubt, soon overtake some of the others. Everybody became interested in his progress, which thus continued in an atmosphere of sympathy and encouragement. Sam was happy and hopeful, his self-confidence restored and his self-respect re-established.

The two other boys who, though ahead of Sam, had been unable, when they entered III<sup>B</sup>, to attempt a reader of Standard I difficulty, were Sydney and Raymond, but they, too, responded to individual teaching, and in spite of some absence, particularly on the part of Raymond, whose poor health continued, they were both able, by the end of the year, to read fairly fluently a book suitable to normal children of Standard II.

Of the remainder of the class, Tommy, John, and Ronnie were able, even at the beginning of the year, to cope successfully with a Standard III Reader, but they were above the normal in intelligence and were the exceptions. All the others could manage a Standard I Reader with varying degrees of efficiency. The best of these were Edward, Arthur, James, Jack, Teddy, and Jeffrey, who read quite fluently matter of that standard of difficulty, while the most backward were



Richard, Keith, Henry, George, Kenneth, Harry, Albert, Arnold, and Jim, who could barely struggle through the text. The attainment of the others was only mediocre, showing a great lack of fluency and much evidence of unsound past work. For many of them, the major demand was for ample practice, for much more frequent contact with printed matter, which they gained as a result of the various incentives to more reading developing out of the activities of the class. In the past, almost every one had been struggling with books too difficult, but when a return was made to easier material in plentiful supply and of an attractive kind, boys began to discover a new enjoyment in reading for its own sake and shunned it no longer. The more advanced readers found considerable satisfaction in giving help to their less able companions, with a resulting improvement in the achievements of both self-appointed teacher and taught, and by the time the year drew to its close, there was no one who failed to read a Standard II book satisfactorily, while in addition to Tommy and John, a good proportion of the class was able to approach with success the books appropriate to Standard III. Of these, outstanding progress had been made not only by Edward, Arthur, James, Jack, Teddy, and Jeffrey, already mentioned as being the most advanced in the class, but also by Alan (whose reading lost the careless and erratic qualities which had previously characterized it), Donald (who put much concentrated effort into his work), Neville, David (whose achievement was unexpected), Dennis, Charlie (whose timidity had always been a retarding influence in spite of the fact that his innate ability was among the highest in the class), Stanley (who also had to contend with the shy reserve of his character), Frank (who was surprised to find himself the possessor of a capacity hitherto unrecognized), and Douglas, whose progress, like that of Charlie, was unanticipated. Jim, Harry, Joe, George, and Richard lagged somewhat behind them, and Keith, Kenneth, Arnold, and Albert, followed at a little distance. Although these nine were not yet capable of good work with a Standard III Reader, they were fully up to the level expected of a good Standard II.

Reading, however, is not an end in itself, it is a means to many ends, and the activities of the boys of III<sup>B</sup> helped them not only to acquire a skill but also to exercise and make use of it, while in the very act of thus employing it, they strengthened their mastery of the skill itself. In reading for information in history, in making tickets, notices, and posters, in preparing poems and short passages for the entertainment of the class, they were not only fashioning their tool, but discovering simultaneously how to employ it with intelligence and purpose.

Considering, then, all the results of the year's labours, it was impossible to deny that very appreciable strides had been made in the field of the three R's, and equally impossible to believe that such improvement would have emerged had the old barren methods of conscientious plodding by a despairing teacher been retained for another twelve months. Not only was it proved that these essentially intellectual subjects could be taught by less orthodox means, but it was clearly demonstrated that they could be thus taught with greater success. At the same time, they had been relegated to their rightful place as instruments instead of ends. Undue stress had been lifted from them, the pace had not been forced, each boy had made that degree of progress which was possible to him, and all had had their feet set steadily on the path of still further advance.

But the benefits derived from all that had been done were not restricted to the 'Three R's'. More vital than any of these to boys of this type was the cultivation of the power to communicate ideas by word of mouth. For them as for most others, speech would always remain the most important means of communication and expression. Yet, in the past, even the so-called Oral lessons, History, Nature Study, and Geography, had been oral mainly only in so far as the teacher was concerned. The contributions of the boys were generally confined to the answering of questions on the matter of the lessons, with the result that they were deprived of full enjoyment by the necessity for remembering facts. But, now, for the first time, Speaking was given a legitimate and foremost place in

school work. Simultaneously it developed a new bias. As in Reading and Writing, so in Speaking, the emphasis was now lifted, in the minds of the boys, from the tool, to the purpose for which it was to be employed, after which they were not long in apprehending the need for a more efficient tool itself.

For satisfactory Speaking, the fundamental requirements were a subject of sufficiently vital appeal, the power to think clearly, to select and marshal facts and ideas and to present them in a clear and logical way with the aid of an adequate vocabulary, and an effective manner of delivery. The activities of the boys supplied ample material for satisfying such demands. In the first place, the roots of the success achieved in oral work, like that in other branches of their activities, were to be discovered in the fact that these children were gripped by their subjects. They identified themselves so completely with the people or the life under consideration that what they did and what they said was actually a part of themselves—they felt strongly and believed implicitly in the matter with which they were concerned. Secondly, constant discussion, argument and criticism, were involved in the work in History, in the problems presented by the construction of the post office equipment and the properties and dresses connected with the play, as well as in the evolving of the play itself. Thirdly, in their discussions and talks, and especially in the play, they were obliged to pay attention to the use of the language, they began to weigh their words, to take pleasure in the feeling of power growing out of a more confident handling of them, and to develop the first elements of a sense of style. Thus their work stood to them in the relation of that conversation with a friend which 'maketh daylight in the understanding out of darkness and confusion of thoughts' and enlightens a man so that 'he tosseth his thoughts more easily, he marshalleth them more orderly, he seeth how they look when they are turned into words'. Finally, that freshly acquired confidence revealed itself in the disappearance of the timidity and the tied-tongue of past days, and in the absence of the strain which so often attends the formal practice of oral

composition, and the boys now spoke out clearly and convincingly for all the world to hear

Joe distinguished himself, but he was not alone. Jim's humorous, good-natured, attractive, personality soon became a factor in oral work, Keith, Jeffrey, Neville, Donald, Roy, Albert, Alan, and Douglas, all gave proof of a not inconsiderable ability, and even George became less reluctant to exercise his powers of speech

An emphasis as strong as that on Speaking was placed during this year on Making. The boys spent much time on the construction of a variety of things which they had the pleasure, when made, of seeing and using. Not to give every encouragement to this practical activity was to rob them of one of the chief sources of satisfaction open to the less intellectually gifted (for many dull children are quite capable with their hands) and to deprive them of an essential vehicle for the expression of their creative instincts. At the same time, from a purely utilitarian point of view, it was doing them a direct and practical service to foster any enterprise involving manual training, since it was almost certainly in this field that their future earning-capacity would lie. Furthermore, for them, Making was an indispensable part of Learning, for it was by the co-ordinating activity of the hand and the eye that the mind was enabled to understand and the memory to retain.

The Handwork involved in the various aspects of the work of IIIb offered something vastly different from that to which the class had previously been accustomed. The unloved notebooks, pencil-cases, and similar objects, belonging to bygone Handwork lessons, had required for their success a minute accuracy of measurement entirely outside the scope of the majority of the boys, and had employed, as their medium, delicately coloured paper, all too easily soiled, with the result that an activity which should have yielded up great pleasure contributed nothing better than discouragement, dissatisfaction, and aversion. Moreover—fundamental error from the viewpoint of the teacher of dull children—there was no fascinating purpose about such models, as there was about the

ollar-box and its attendant objects, there was no romance, no appeal to the imagination, as there was in the chariots of the Ancient Britons or in the swords, armour, and dresses of the play, and there was no claim upon resourcefulness and inventiveness as there was in the making of everything now fashioned by the boys. By the old method, they were shown how to do a thing, by the new, they had to bring their own wits into play, by the old method, their creative powers were allowed to atrophy, by the new, they were brought into full exercise. Now, they drew from their Making an enjoyment and a gratification the impression of which one might hope they would carry with them up the school, and which, at some future time, might induce them to realize how many profitable and satisfying leisure hours could be occupied in some healthy creative activity of the hands. Their school career would then have given them at least something to counterbalance the more worthless attractions of modern life, to make them free from complete dependence upon amusements from outside, and to help them to recognize the fund of power within themselves upon which they might draw for pleasure and solace, as their brighter brothers might turn to books.

Meanwhile, one had only to contemplate the drabness and discomfort of the home lives of so many of these boys to realize how they found an immediate compensating happiness, brightness and colour not only in the delight they drew from the satisfying employment of their hands, but also in all the exciting adventures of school activity. They could not fail to emerge from the work of the year with a strengthening of their powers, not only of enjoyment, but also of sympathetic appreciation. Through their dramatic work, their studies in History, their pleasure in poetry, their drawing, their creative Handwork, they were lifted into that happy world of the imagination which should be so much the province of children of this age, but which for so many of them had hitherto remained closed or only half-open, and they were brought into touch with refining influences, which, if the school could not provide, they would, almost certainly, never experience at all.

There were other, easily perceived benefits which emerged from the work of this year, benefits which, for boys like these, were of no mean importance. For they learnt, by their activities, to work in amicable co-operation, to unite for a common purpose—a new development in a group previously characterized by its ragged disunity. They learnt to help one another, and enjoyed doing so, exemplified in a small way by Kenneth's letter in which he thought it worth while to mention that he was 'helping Fred to do his A the right way round'. They learnt also to set themselves high standards in their work, which they pursued with all a child's seriousness as well as all his zest, and they were able to bring to it a complete sincerity, born of the freedom of choice and treatment allowed to them. In their school hours, they lived fully, and it was no small pleasure to watch their absorbed busy-ness. They were encouraged to persevere, and were helped to sustain their efforts by the interested motives behind them. They began to develop a more intelligent, observant outlook, and to appreciate the world, even their confined world, as an exciting place in which to be. Above all, they had been given space in which to expand, a liberal and wholesome atmosphere where their individual personalities might have the opportunity to develop healthily and naturally. For, in the first place, the sudden realization that the teacher was no longer in opposition to them, and was not to be regarded as their common enemy, awoke in them a quite unlooked-for spirit of magnanimity, one even of self-reproach, a reaction expressed in not a few of their letters, and some remote feeling of gratitude is evident in their spontaneous apologies for being 'bad lads'. Dennis, for example, who thought nothing of shop-breaking, and was the admired and respected leader of his 'gang', returned more than once to the theme with notes like the following:

*I have been a bad boy while my sister as been ill and I want to make up for it at home and school*

Sidney, too, seemed to feel qualms about his behaviour, for he wrote in a similar strain:

*I am every sorry I have been a every bad boy leatlay and I will make*

*up for It and I want to no when your birthy day is on my birthy day is on the forth of settamber and dont fegt to tell me ancer back*

Edward announced

*I wish to turn over a new leaf, and I see you are bize this afternoon but you look very happy*

And Roy, who, in his most abandoned moments, was incapable of real naughtiness, declared

*I am göing to be good all the year round and I will do my best in my part I am the queen as you know*

Combined with promises of good behaviour came thanks to the teacher for her teaching and assurances of an intention to work hard in the future. When Sam reached the stage at which he could attempt a letter, he wrote

*I am very glad that you teach me to red I Ho(pe) that (you) ar happy in the class Miss Taylor*

This was followed shortly by another note which proved the sincerity of his desire to learn

*I where sorry to be of (=off) school But when I was of school I (was) leaning to read and stpell*

Harry was no less appreciative

*Thank you for learning me to spelle, and I will do a favour by beying a good boy And help in many ways*

Tommy was concerned about his handwriting which was not very good

*I will do my best in writing so that I might succeed in beeing the top I have been careless before but I will keep on trying*

And when Douglas began to make visible progress he did not fail to express his satisfaction

*I am very glad I am getting on I hope you have a very good time at home. I am glad I can do spellings good*

It was evident, then, when these boys were anxious to be good in school and were willing to work of their own accord, that many of the perverting influences of the past had been removed, and that the causes of many thwarting inhibitions had vanished from the classroom, a fact which, together with the development of new activities, more suitable to the boys' natures and abilities, the opportunities for experiment and for the display of initiative and individuality, and the application

of a new kind of discipline, allowed each boy to have a fair chance of developing what was best in his character. Thus it was that George was unobtrusively induced to throw off his exaggerated reserve. In the past, his taciturnity had caused him almost of necessity to be ignored, for the busy teacher of a class has very little time to devote exclusively to a single one of its members and especially to one so unresponsive to her ministrations. In any case, the surest way to increase George's trouble was to make him conscious of particular attention focused upon him, and, in IIIb, such a contingency was avoided. Here, he found himself suddenly in the midst of a busy, exciting little world. In spite of himself, he could not resist being drawn into its activities, however small his contribution, and through them, he became increasingly articulate. For Donald, this year did no less a service than for George, for without any doubt, it was here, in an atmosphere of greater kindness and friendliness than anything he could expect from his home, that he experienced his first twelve months of real happiness. Truancy no longer held out any inducements to him, and he developed into a very helpful and considerate member of the class, showing himself most loyal to those he liked and trusted.

Sam and Harry forgot their shyness and regained their self-confidence. When Sam entered the class he was in no doubt about his inability to write, to read, to spell, but he soon discovered that these were only some of the possible activities in which he might employ himself. He unexpectedly found himself drawing a tribute of applause for a piece of acting from the very companions among whom he had previously considered himself a conspicuous dunce; he undertook the organization of the post office, he grew to realize how well he could work with his hands, then he made the discovery that he was beginning after all to be able to read, he felt that he was indeed not the 'blockhead' he had always believed himself to be; he was no longer an inferior, he could take his place confidently with the rest. Harry was the boy who had come weeping into IIIa. Previous experience seemed to have taught him that it made little difference to what class he



belonged—his success would be no greater in one than another. But within a short time, the tears were changed to smiles. Among the varied activities of the class he found one which above all gave him great satisfaction, and the boy who had consistently failed to make headway in the Three R's now extracted his most complete pleasure from the composing of his letters—from, in fact, nothing less than *written composition*. For David and Richard, it was creative Handwork which provided the necessary food for the development of mind and character, so that, while they wrote very few letters, they made outstanding contributions to the practical work of the class; their minds and hands were now actively and purposefully employed, in occupations adapted to their special requirements. Joe, Neville, and Keith drew most benefit from oral work both in history, in the composing of the play and in poetry. Here was a legitimate outlet for their special ability and for their tendency to self-display, an outlet, moreover, which involved something more than mere 'showing-off', for they had always to take into account the critical spirit of the class. As for Jeffrey, everything was grist that came to his mill. He participated in every activity with equal zest, his lively imagination had now an abundance of material on which to feed, it was all immediately at hand, he no longer needed to look for it outside the classroom.

Though Albert had by a coincidence been the instigator of two kinds of activity, it was in dramatic and oral work that he found the most congenial means of self-development. His character began to unfold, and his sense of responsibility to increase, while the spirit of co-operation which had been evoked in the early weeks of the year, persisted undiminished until the end. As for Alan, erratic, haphazard, and unreliable, it was impossible to put one's finger on any one aspect of the year's work which appeared to exercise a special influence on him, yet the effect upon him of his months in IIIa was apparent and definite. He wrote numerous letters, most of them very poor ones, like that which read.

*thank you evry much please to hear from you and I ma starting a new letters for you and I how you will be please with it.*

He made useful, if not striking, contributions to the activities of the class, but it was in the acquisition of a greater steadiness, in the improvement in his conduct, in the less frequent display of the meanness of his character, and in the new willingness to work amicably with his companions, that he gave evidence of progress. Though he still found it difficult to persevere, he nevertheless genuinely wished to work well, and from time to time made strong efforts to do so, with good results which were seen most clearly in his arithmetic and his reading. He began to show signs of a growing fondness for books, and was proud of being allowed to borrow an easy Reader from Standard IIIA, on which occasion he dispatched a note with the request

*Would you mind to hearing me read the Blue Book what I got from Stander IIIA*

Examples such as these illustrate how each boy took from his year in IIIB what he most needed, and the effect upon him was definite and unmistakable. Jim blossomed unexpectedly, particularly through dramatic work, and revealed an unsuspected attractiveness of disposition, and a mischievous sense of humour. Kenneth and Roy had many opportunities of exercising their qualities of solid dependability. Stanley, apparently so quiet and dull, revealed a hitherto unrecognized sprightliness of interest, and Henry, the lion, came to resemble more closely his counterpart, the lamb. He no longer threatened his teachers with physical violence or stirred up trouble in the classroom, for he soon found that he had no supporters in his rebellion, and that it seemed more profitable to join in the activity with the rest. Thus all became better, because happier and more naturally unrestrained boys, and for many of them the readjustments of outlook and the free emergence of character were as important as anything the year could bestow. It was perhaps not too much to hope that the seeds had here been planted which might one day give birth to a more useful citizenship than could otherwise have been possible.

It was in the creation of this liberal atmosphere that much of the importance of the teacher herself was embodied. Her

function was less to pack knowledge into the boys, like meat into a sausage-skin, than to guide and help them to teach themselves, and to draw out their latent powers. It was therefore imperative to encourage conditions in which the boys could behave naturally and reveal spontaneously where their instinctive interests and their real abilities lay. The teacher had to be an opportunist—to be on the alert for the pregnant remarks or suggestions of the boys themselves, to be quick to catch the spark, and to prevent it from dying out. She had, moreover, to distinguish rapidly which *were* the truly pregnant suggestions, to open the eyes of the children to the value of their own ideas, and to set them on the track of developing and enlarging them. She had to judge when to stand aside, and when to interpose some contribution from the well of her own knowledge and experience, or some judicious help which would nip the bud of discouragement, so dangerous a factor in the educational life of the dull and backward child. She had, in this connexion, always to keep in mind the individual boy with his own particular need, and to ensure that each drew from his experiences in school some real and effectual benefits, for confused or aimless teaching would have been of equally little value to these as to cleverer children. At all times, the teacher had to ascertain that the work undertaken was based on sound principles, to eschew novelty for mere novelty's sake, and to distinguish between superficial devices and fundamental essentials. And if she hoped to make the year happy and profitable for the boys, she had to make it equally happy and profitable for herself, she, like them, must enjoy doing and making, she, too, must be anxious to add to her own stock of knowledge and to broaden her own powers of understanding, while the sympathetic interest she displayed in the activities of the boys had to be real and unfeigned and to emanate from a feeling of genuine affinity to the interests of their young minds.

And, here, it is perhaps permissible to add one further word. The boys of this group were, almost without exception, of dull mentality, but, at their highest level, they verged upon the normal. The lowest section of most normal classes would

contain children with mentalities similar to those (excluding Tommy, John, and Ronnie) in the topmost section of IIIb. There are, moreover, few teachers who will dispute that normality itself does not apparently represent a very high standard of intellectual ability. Is it not reasonable in view of these considerations, to hold the belief that, even in the case of normal children, methods of teaching such as those which succeeded with these backward boys might be very profitably substituted for the more intellectual approach, which, after all, belongs to a system with roots far back in the past, when the aims and conditions of Education were quite different from those of to-day? The older methods 'just grewed' out of usage and custom, the newer activity methods represent a genuine attempt to base the teaching upon the real needs and capacities of the taught. We hear objections based on the size of classes, and criticisms of methods which teach the children 'to do nothing but play'. But it is surprising how much can be done by a determined teacher even in a large class, and the time will certainly come when classes are smaller, while activity methods, *properly understood and employed*, demand of the children just as high a measure of the qualities of perseverance, determination, and hard work as was ever required of them. Of the teacher, of course, they demand a changed outlook from that of the past. She must no longer be content merely to dispense knowledge, or to train skills, for teaching is nothing less than a creative art, and the teacher a creative artist working in the most fascinating medium in the world.

The work of IIIb has been achieved in face of some practical difficulties. There was the limitation in time, as well as in scope, arising from the fact that the teacher had to do some specialization in other classes, so that the periods devoted to Geography and Nature Study were the province of another member of the staff. There was also the disadvantage of a lack of material and equipment specially designed for backward children, which had to be overcome by improvisation and which was, in the end, probably no disadvantage at all, since it encouraged the invention whose mother is necessity.

But the really irksome limitation lay in the smallness of the classroom, which, full of desks and boys, allowed very inadequate space for movement and activity and for the free distribution of the hundred and one materials and properties always in demand. Even this, however, was not an insurmountable difficulty and was circumvented, for instance, by the substitution of wall-space for floor-space, as in the case of the diagram of the Anglo-Saxon village, or by the use of the main hall by some sections of the class, while, in order to work comfortably in the confined space, the boys had to learn the value of self-restraint, tidiness, order, and organization.

The story of IIIb was now ended, and the boys passed on to the next standard. They returned once more to the old régime—to the collective class-instruction, the dictated syllabus, the formal time-table, and the classroom restrictions of former times. Even so, the good effects of their year's work were not entirely lost, for the children approached their new tasks with certain definite advantages. They were no longer prejudiced against school life and work, a major asset worth every attempt of their teacher to retain and to cultivate. They had ceased to be oppressed by the sense of their own ineptitude, or robbed of confidence by constant discouragement. Their attainments in the Three R's had reached a much more satisfactory standard than could have been hoped, and all the boys had laid secure foundations for future progress, if only they could be aided to persevere and allowed to move forward each at his own pace. In History (representative of the Oral subjects), in manual training, and in intelligent use of the language, they were inestimably better equipped than they had ever been before, and in behaviour and general outlook they were different beings. The experience of IIIb left its mark upon them, so that, at a later date, it was possible for a member of the staff to pick out, merely by his attitude, a boy who had come under the influences of that year.

But recognition of two considerations was required if such improvements were to be maintained. In the first place, the limitations of dull children should have been accepted—to ignore this fact was to kick obstinately against the pricks, but

in the second place, these boys, like others of poor mental endowment, were not so deficient as to be entirely without ability or useful qualities—their abilities, however, tended to lie outside the field of the more intellectual aspects of school work. These limitations had to be accepted, these capacities sought, and the way pursued with patience and faith, for, though to each dull boy the teacher points an inexorable fate:

Even so the springs are set  
That move thy life, nor will they suffer let,  
Nor change their scope  
This is thy life

Yet, she may add also the word of inspiration.

                    indulge its natural flow,  
And carve these forms    They yet may find a place  
On shelves for them reserved



APPENDIX I  
THE SWORD IN THE ANVIL

*Characters*

Prince Arthur	1st Knight
Sir Kay	2nd Knight
Sir Ector	3rd Knight
Archbishop of Canterbury	1st Man
Merlin	2nd Man
King Uther	3rd Man
Queen Ingraine	4th Man
A Noble Lord	5th Man
Merchant	6th Man
Boy	
His Father	

*Date—Fourteenth Century*

SCENE I

THE POSTERN GATE, KING UTHUR'S CASTLE, TINTAGEL, CORNWALL

*(Enter MERLIN, disguised as a beggar, leaning heavily on his staff. He goes up to the gate and gives three loud knocks with his staff. He waits, but no one comes. He knocks again, still no one appears. He strikes the gate a third time. It is opened by the 1ST KNIGHT.)*

1st Knight What dost thou want, stranger, knocking at the gate at this late hour?

Merlin I come to seek the King

1st Knight What can a poor beggar like thee want with the King?

Merlin Sir Knight, I beseech thee, take my message to the King.

1st Knight Well, what is thy name, and what dost thou want?

Merlin I may not reveal my name to thee, only tell the King a vagabond awaits him at the gate



*1st Knight:* The King is feasting at the moment with his great lords, and if I interrupt him with such news he might have me put to death.

*(Another KNIGHT comes to the gate)*

*2nd Knight* Hullo! Hullo! Who goes there? Have we got a visitor?

*1st Knight* A beggar wants me to take a message to the King.

*2nd Knight* There's no chance of that, he's in one of his dark moods, I fear.

*Merlin (Angrily)* I tell thee, I must see his Majesty. If thou dost not let me see him, thy master will be sorry!

*2nd Knight* Well, tell me your message. We might as well get it over as stand here arguing.

*Merlin* Only tell him that a beggar is waiting for him and he will know what it means.

*2nd Knight* Wait there. I will only be two minutes.

*(He goes off singing a jolly song)*

*1st Knight* By my halidom! It's cold to-night. Methinks we shall have snow. Hast thou far to travel, stranger?

*Merlin* I have travelled many weary miles and still have many more to go.

*1st Knight* Sit down and rest awhile. This stone is not a very soft seat, but it's better than standing.

*Merlin* The night is cold and long and the sea looks angry battering on the rocks.

*1st Knight* The sea is often rough and wild here. A few days ago a ship coming from a distant land was thrown upon the cliffs and broken to pieces. We never ride out upon the sea at this time of the year if we can help it.

*Merlin* Nor would anyman, I should think, unless he were mad.

*1st Knight* But thou, too, art thou, an old man, wise to travel so far in this cold weather? It must be an important journey that thou hast undertaken.

*Merlin* It is indeed important —But what is that?—do I not hear a footstep on the path?

*1st Knight (Looking in at gateway)* It is our friend returning. I fear thou wilt not have much luck!—But what is this?

The King is with him!—And the Queen, too! And she carries in her arms their baby son, the little prince

*Merlin* It is as I thought

*1st Knight (Wonderingly)* Who art thou, then?

*(Enter 2ND KNIGHT, KING UThER, and QUEEN INGRAINE who is carrying the baby. They walk slowly towards MERLIN )*

*King* We have kept our promise, though it makes us very sad to part with our little son

*Queen* I pray thee, Merlin, look after him well

*1st Knight* Merlin!

*Merlin* You have both kept your promise, and I will keep mine Because I helped thee, O King, thou didst swear to give to me thy first-born son, and I said that I would have him brought up and well-cared for

*Queen* I would that we might keep him

*King* We have given our word and must keep it Give Merlin the child

*Merlin (Taking the baby gently from the QUEEN)* Farewell, no harm shall befall the baby

*Queen (As MERLIN moves away)* Farewell, my little one

*King* Farewell

*(They stand watching until MERLIN is out of sight Then KING UThER gently leads the QUEEN back through the gate The two KNIGHTS follow and bolt the gate )*

## SCENE II

A ROOM IN THE ARCHBISHOP'S PALACE, FOURTEEN YEARS LATER

*(The ARCHBISHOP is sitting at the table, speaking to a NOBLE LORD.)*

*Archbishop* I'm getting tired of all this strife I would that we had a King Now that Uther is dead, who shall be our King?

*Lord* I wonder what became of his little son? If only we had him, our difficulty would be over

*Archbishop* It is many years since the baby disappeared He must be quite a youth now

*Lord* Maybe he died when he was only little with some kind of a fever.

*Archbishop* The land is full of bloodshed, the people are getting anxious, the barons are quarrelling and fighting among themselves, one trying to get above the other. We shall have no people left if they keep on like this. I wish I were out of this country. These happenings make me tremble for the future.

*Lord* I wish we could find some way to end this unhappy state of things. Perhaps we could offer a great reward to any one who could trace the long-lost baby.

*Archbishop* I wonder does Merlin, the wizard, know where he is? Could his power tell us where to find him?

(MERLIN appears in the doorway)

*Merlin* Who speaks my name?

*Noble* Why! 'Tis Merlin, the wizard!

*Archbishop* Merlin himself!

*Merlin* Sirs, I have something to tell you. Do as I command, and all will be well.

*Archbishop* Speak! What must we do?

*Merlin* This is my order. Send for all the lords and gentlemen of arms to come to London by Christmas, upon pain of cursing because Jesus Christ was born on that night, and He will, of His great mercy, show by some miracle, who shall be right-wise King of this realm.

*Archbishop* As thou sayest, it shall be done.

(MERLIN disappears. Exit ARCHBISHOP and NOBLE LORD.)

### SCENE III

ST PAUL'S CHURCHYARD AT CHRISTMAS

(A little to the left and towards the back of the stage is an anvil with a sword sticking from it. The people are just coming slowly out of church, talking as they come.)

*1st Knight* Well, well, if there is to be any miracle, it has not happened yet!

*3rd Knight* It is not usual for Merlin to fail in a miracle

*Merchant* What is all this commotion about a miracle?

*1st Knight* Why, did you not hear of the Archbishop's command, that every noble should come this day to the church, where Merlin the wizard would work a miracle to show who shall be rightful King of this realm?

*Merchant*, I have been travelling and have heard nothing of this news.

*Boy (Running to his father)* Father! Father!

*Father* What ails thee, child?

*Boy (Dragging him towards the anvil)* Come! Look, father, look!

*Father*. The miracle!

*Others (Moving towards it)* The Miracle! The Miracle!

(*Crowd gathers, crying 'The Miracle'*)

*1st Man* Wait, wait! What is this? Gold letters on the anvil!

*2nd Man* Let me see!

*3rd Man* What does it say? Read it

*1st Man* 'Whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone and anvil is right-wise King born of all England.' Come let me try

*3rd Man* He cannot even stir the sword

*1st Man*. Ho, ho! I have not the strength to pull it out

*4th Man* Wait! let me make an attempt!

*5th Man* Stand back there! Give him room!

*6th Man* I don't think any of us can succeed if he cannot!

*1st Man* No! He cannot do it, either!

*3rd Man* Call the Archbishop! Let us see what he says!

*5th Man* Yes, come! To the Archbishop!

(*3RD and 5TH MEN go out.*)

*6th Man* Perhaps I am to be King of England! Let me try!

(*He tries to draw the sword*) It stands as firm as a rock! No matter how I pull, I cannot stir it!

*1st Man* Here comes the Archbishop.

(*Enter ARCHBISHOP, 3RD and 5TH MEN They come up slowly*)

*3rd Man* Lo! your grace, here is the anvil and the wonderful sword!

1st Man No one can yet draw the sword!

5th Man See, here are the golden letters.

Archbishop (*Reads*) 'Whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone and anvil is right-wise King born of all England' (*To the crowd*) Merlin has kept his promise Now shall our country's troubles come to an end! None here can draw the sword, you say?

1st Man I cannot!

4th Man Nor I!

6th Man It's too strong for me!

2nd Man I have not tried yet! (*He tries to draw the sword*)

Nay, it needs a stronger arm than mine!

Archbishop It seems he is not here that shall draw the sword. But, doubt not, God will make him known This is my counsel, that we set Knights, men of good fame, to guard this sword And let it be known that upon New Year's Day, a tournament shall be held, and every man who wishes shall try to win the sword

3rd Knight I will stand guard, your grace, and that right willingly

2nd Knight And I too!

Archbishop You speak well Now let all depart And we will have, at our command, messages sent throughout the land calling all to the tournament on New Year's Day

(*The ARCHBISHOP slowly departs, and the people go away in different directions The 2ND and 3RD KNIGHTS stand one on each side of the anvil*)

## SCENE IV

THE SAME, NEW YEAR'S DAY

(*Enter ARTHUR*)

Arthur What, now, shall I do? I cannot go back to my brother, Sir Kay, without his sword. He cannot go swordless to the tournament What misfortune that he should forget it, and the house locked up, and no one there to

give me the weapon (*He sees the sword in the anvil and goes to it*) What is this I see? Why! a sword sticking from an anvil! It must have been put there on purpose for me. This will suit Sir Kay! I will draw it and take it to him. What a wonderful sword! How it shines! How the haft sparkles! I had better hurry Sir Kay will be delighted with it

(*Enter SIR KAY, meeting ARTHUR as he goes out*)

*Sir Kay* Well, brother, what are thou doing here? I sent thee home for my sword

*Arthur* The door was locked and I could not get in. All were at the tournament

*Sir Kay* What then is that sword in thy hand?

*Arthur* It is the sword out of the anvil here

*Sir Kay* (*Taking sword*) The sword out of the anvil! Who pulled it out for thee?

*Arthur* I drew it out myself. I did not wish thee to be swordless, and while I wondered what to do, I saw this and——

(*Enter SIR ECTOR*)

*Sir Kay* Lo, here comes my father, Sir Ector! Sir, look, here is the sword out of the stone. Therefore I must be King of this land

*Sir Ector* Come, let me see with my own eyes Why, truly it is the sword Arthur, hasten into the church, and bring the Holy Book, and Sir Kay shall swear how he came to get it

(*ARTHUR runs into the church, while SIR ECTOR examines the sword and the anvil, and SIR KAY stands aside, looking uncomfortable Re-enter ARTHUR*)

*Sir Ector* (*Taking the book, and holding it out to SIR KAY*) Swear upon this book and tell me, truly, how did ye come by this sword?

*Sir Kay* (*Placing his hand upon the Book*) Sir, my brother Arthur, he brought it to me

*Sir Ector* Arthur! How did ye come by this sword?

*Arthur* Sir, I will tell you When I came home for my brother's

sword, I found no one there to give it me. So I thought my brother should not be swordless and when I saw this one, I pulled it easily from the anvil.

*Sir Ector* Were there any knights near this anvil?

*Arthur* Nay.

*Sir Ector* (*Going down on one knee before ARTHUR*) Now, I understand, ye must be King of all this land.

*Arthur* Wherefore I, and for what cause? Why dost thou bow to me, a father to his son?

*Sir Ector* (*Rising*) Arthur, I am not thy father, neither is Sir Kay thy brother. Merlin, the wizard, gave thee to me, many years ago. Then I did not know who thou wast, but now I understand that thou art of higher blood than I. Thou art a royal child, the lost son of King Uther!

(*Enter TWO MEN talking. They notice that the sword is missing.*)

*1st Man* The sword is out of the anvil!

*Sir Ector* (*To the men*) I pray you call the Archbishop that he may see this wonder.

(*Exit MEN, and enter FATHER and BOY. The child skips along. FATHER stops, pulls BOY back and stares at anvil.*)

*Father* (*Shouting loudly*) Something has happened! Something has happened! The sword is out of the anvil!

(*An excited crowd gathers, talking eagerly. Enter the ARCHBISHOP.*)

*Sir Ector* (*To ARCHBISHOP*) Lo! your grace, I have called you here to see the wonderful thing that has happened. This lad, only a youth, has drawn Merlin's sword from the anvil.

*Archbishop* Arthur, how did this happen?

*Arthur* Your grace, I will tell you. My brother sent me home for his sword. But when I got home, I found no one there to give it me, and when I came here and saw this one, I pulled it out easily and gave it to him.

*Archbishop* I bid thee, Arthur, put back the sword in the anvil and one of you shall try again to draw it out.

(*ARTHUR takes the sword and replaces it, and one of the crowd tries to pull it out again.*)

*Man* Nay, I cannot

*Archbishop* Arthur, show us if thou canst pull it out

*(ARTHUR pulls out the sword with a flourish The crowd gasps  
and murmurs with amazement)*

*Archbishop* There can be no doubt about it. He must be the  
rightful King of England!

*(Murmurs from the crowd The ARCHBISHOP raises his hand  
and speaks dramatically)*

The rightful King of England! God Save the King!

*Crowd* God save the King! *(Loud cheers)*

CURTAIN



## APPENDIX II

### INTELLIGENCE AND INTELLIGENCE TESTS

THERE MAY be some readers who are unfamiliar with the subject, and to whom the following remarks concerning Intelligence and Intelligence Testing may therefore be helpful.

Everybody has his own interpretation of the word 'intellect' (easily apprehended, but difficult to define); but it is used by educationists and psychologists in a specific sense, to denote that general capacity which is innate in each individual, and which governs all those mental activities concerned with *thinking* and *knowing*, even when they are applied, not only in the more confined sphere of the subjects commonly described as 'intellectual', but also in the broader field of practical work where the practical activities depend upon thinking and understanding.

It is this general all-round capacity which Intelligence Tests seek to measure. From the result of the test, itself, is calculated the 'Mental Age' of the boy or girl. This is then used in the formula

$$\frac{\text{Mental Age}}{\text{Actual Age}} \times 100 = \text{Mental Ratio}$$

The commonly used expression 'Intelligence Quotient' (usually shortened to I Q) is the American equivalent of the term 'Mental Ratio'.

Thus, a boy with a Mental Age of 8, and an Actual (or 'Chronological') Age of 10, would have an Intelligence Quotient of 80—

$$\frac{8}{10} \times 100 = 80$$

In this way it is possible to make broad classifications which provide a helpful guide to the teacher when exploring the mental level of her class, and help her to grade the children, at least tentatively, according to the varying standards of

their General Intelligences. A child who, as the result of his performances in the mental tests adapted to his age, is found to possess an I Q. of about 100, is regarded as of normal intelligence, while those with I Q.'s ranging down as low as 85 may be said to be endowed with slightly sub-normal mentalities. As the I Q.'s descend the scale, the children become definitely dull, until, with a mental ratio of 70, they reach a stage when they are not far removed from being qualified for admittance to the Special Schools provided for the mentally defective.

In addition to this *general* intellectual capacity a child may show a *special* ability (or, of course, a special lack of ability) in one particular direction. Richard, for example, had a general intelligence of a very low order, but a special ability in solving problems through Handwork, Dennis's all-round capacity was not very high, but he was disproportionately incapable of mastering his work in Arithmetic.

If this were all that had to be said on the subject of Intelligence, the problem for the teacher would be, if not easy, at least straightforward. Unfortunately, however, the issue is almost always much complicated by the retarding effects upon the child's progress of absenteeism, ill-health, or physical weakness, unfavourable home circumstances, peculiarities of temperament, and, perhaps, of unsuitable teaching, so that it becomes very difficult to judge, from mere observation, how far a boy's inferior standard of attainment is due to his own innate dullness, and how far to adverse external influences. Thus, a child may be endowed with 'normal' mental capacity, but, for a variety of reasons, may be below the normal in progress and attainment, in which case, he is described as 'backward', whereas his companion of already poor intelligence, who is also achieving less than the maximum possible to him, is both 'Dull' and 'Backward'. This was the fate of practically all the boys of IIIb.

Many dull and backward children are unable to read, and this is equally true of children of all degrees of intelligence who are as yet too young to have acquired this skill, but whom it is wished to test. For them, tests have been devised which dispense with the necessity for the printed word and involve



instead the manipulation of certain apparatus or exercises presented in picture form. Such picture-tests had to be employed with a large section of the personnel of Standard IIIb.

'Backwardness' shows itself in a more acute form among dull children than among those of normal or super-normal capacity, for it is the dull child who is usually more prone to illness and absence from school, and who has not the power to make up the leeway in his progress caused by such interruptions, or to adapt himself quickly and easily to new circumstances. Aversion from school life develops, and he becomes still less willing to apply himself to his work. Dull children tend, also, to be more subject than others to emotional disturbances, and, though poverty is not a direct cause of mental dullness, the dull child often comes from a poor type of home where the parents themselves are not possessed of sufficiently good mentalities to enable them to fill more fortunate places in the world, or to transmit high degrees of intelligence to their offspring. It is, indeed, to just such people as these that special training in school-days could be so valuable in strengthening their self-respect, and in helping them to make the most of what abilities they may possess.